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ELEONGRE ;

AND OTHER POEMS.



ELEONORE;

AND

Other Poems.

BY HAMILTON AÏDÉ.

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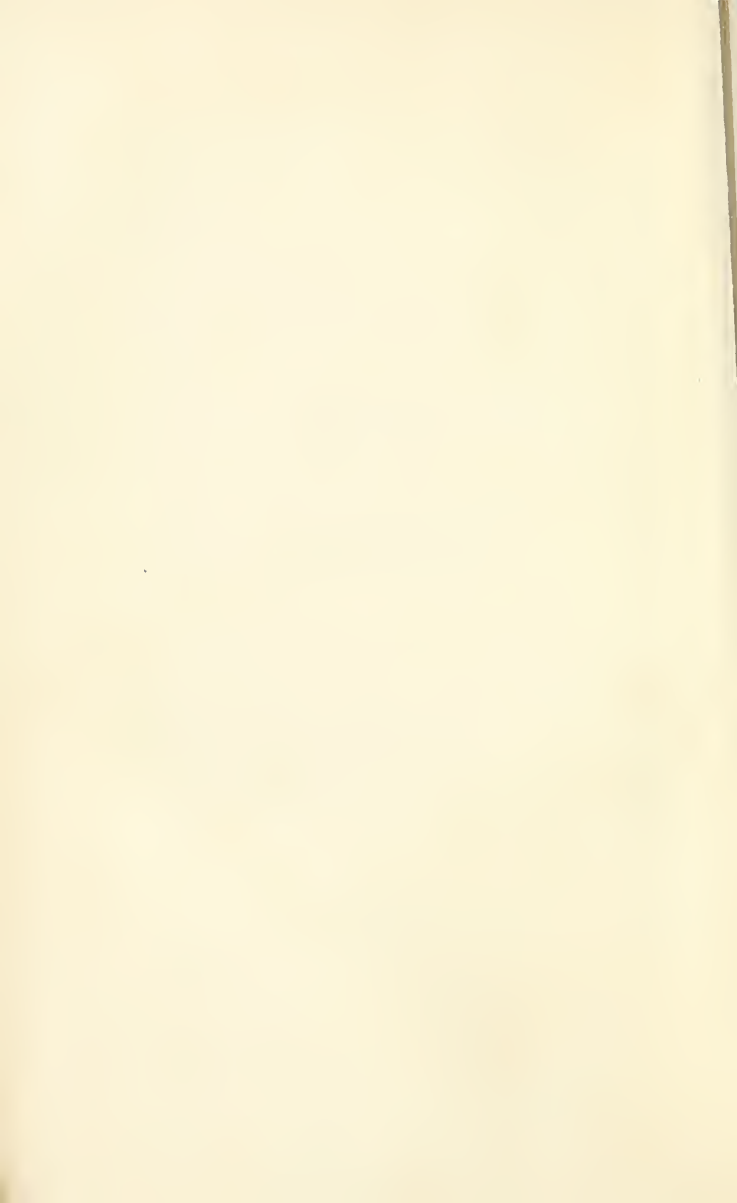
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ELEONORE.



INTRODUCTION.



It chanced, one bronzed autumn-morn,
Just at that season when the corn
Awaits the sickle, and the grapes
Are blushing into purple shapes,
That to a valley sunk too deep
For echoes, 'mong the hills asleep,—
My feet, in following the gleam
Of a young silver-threaded stream,
Along its tortuous course descended
All day; as through the rocks it snarl'd,
Now crept, now leapt 'neath thick-set vines,

Red-beaded ash, and olive gnarl'd,—
Until its convolutions tended
Down a blue gorge, where lofty pines
Stood sentinel.

My footstep broke
The stillness of the wood, and woke
An echo on the crispèd air.
Crushing the leaves of the old year
With elsewhere noiseless tread. Adown
The valley, as I went, there fell
A radiance on the woods, that told
Of day departing, and the frown
Of pines ambrosial darker grew
Against the evening sky. Right through
This wood the stream its course did keep,
Till it stood by an ancient well,

With trees inwoven quite, and old
With mosses brown, and buds of gold ;
And then it sank, at last, to sleep.
Hard by a seat stood, crown'd with weeds,
Where pilgrims might tell o'er their beads,
And rest, in fitting solitude ;
Eyes fixt upon the cross, which stood,
A metaphor, that fount beside,
Of His atoning power, who died
To cleanse mankind from the gangrene
And leprous spots of sin. The stones
Up-bearing this small cross, were grey
With age, and smoothly worn away
By the hard-kneeling weary bones
Of some St. Jerome. Carvèd heads
Look'd out from their cold stony beds

Much mutilate ; and here, no doubt,

A little chapel erst had been—

Its shatter'd altar on the ground

Lay mouldering, and all about,

On broken tombs, devices quaint ;

On one, a “ *goose-foot* ”—that brand

Of an outcast people through this land

And here and there a kneeling saint,

Who clasp'd his hands, and grimly frown'd.

Not far off,—there stood, alone,

Two grassy graves, with never a stone

For year or name : but, at their head

Leant a small wooden cross instead ;

Whereon two letters, which the rain

And dews have half effaced, remain.

And over them I trace the last

Touch of a mortal hand, which crown'd

Them with unfading buds—embrown'd

And beaten by the winter's blast ;

And some unknotted on the ground.

Whose was the hand that sanctified

These mountain-graves ? and what the life

Of its poor outcasts ? . . . one of strife

And storm, who now sleep side by side ? . . .

I question'd ; and the browsing goats

With tinkling bells, for all reply,

Came and stared round me ; and the thrushes

Made unimaginable notes

Of music, in a bough hard by—

While through the river's bulrushes

A wind went creeping ; nought else spoke.

The Sun slips down . . . stars rise, like sparks
From the dead King's last sceptre-blow.
In the West Heaven four burning marks
His chariot-wheels' descension show.
The pale and cradled moon that broke
O'er yon ridge of mountain, now
Has grown up ruddier in the black
Arms of the Night : and I with slow
Reluctant steps, must wander back,
Down the steep silver-lighted hills,
To a sandy bay that ever fills
The ripple of a tideless sea,
And there, my village hostelrie.
And, as I go, an ancient song
I knew in distant days, along
My full heart flutters ; breaking forth,

Just as its half-forgotten rhymes
 Reach me in snatches, the far North
 Recalling and dear household times!

I.

“Blow, Western Winds, around my father’s door.
 Blow softly: snap not the o’erladen stalks:
 Drift the red leaf through casements to the floor;
 And warmly whistle down the laurel walks.

II.

“Blow as that evening when I last beheld
 The elm-trees answer to your rustling call—
 The apron flutter which my Phillis held,
 Shaking the peaches from the garden-wall.

III.

“Blow round the memory of my home and her;
 The budding passions of our June and May,—
 O richer far than frankincense or myrrh,
 Remains the odour of its new-mown hay.”

* * * * *

That evening, with my tired feet
 Out-stretched upon the hearthstone mat,
In the capacious chimney-seat
 Of a far-fashioned room, I sat ;—
The inn's old parlour, beam-sustained,
With casements deep and diamond-paned,
Cinque-corner'd, full of narrow nooks,
 Where two might sprawl their tankards over,
 Or, if a maiden and her lover,
Stand, basking in each other's looks !
Eight men could sit within the smoke
Of its great chimney, of carv'd oak ;
Where, over them, on the shelf, were ranged
The wide-mouth'd flagons, interchanged
 With citron-jars, and back to back,
Bless'd reliques, from far shrines in Spain ;

With groups grotesque, of porcelain ;
Shepherds, in high-heel'd shoes, on rocks,
A-teaching maids to mind their flocks,
 In commode, hoop, and sacque.

Along the settle's length I lie :
The whiles, mine hostess, standing by,
From choicest herbs a posset made ;
With party-color'd kerchief spread
Cross-wise, upon her shining head ;
And dancing in her quick bright eyes
Flame-points, that from the pine-wood rise ;
 As o'er she stoop'd, with radiant smile :
Up-tuckt the chintz-brocaded gown
 With flow of talk, most versatile,
And cheeks like poppies over-blown—

—She was a widow. Many a tale
Of strange experiences she knew :

Something on all points . . . She had lived
Through the old Revolution too.

I said, “ Grammère, in yonder vale,
Fast-lockt in over-lapping hills,
Hard by a fountain, fed with rills
For ever, are two graves, grass'd-o'er,
(Wist you the spot ?) . . . My mind is moved

To know their names who lie beneath.
And of their life, and if they loved

So truly, living, who, in death
Seem undivided.”

Suddenly,

The lusty smile she mostly wore
Sadden'd and died. . . . “ God's life,” quoth she,

“That is a dismal tale, sweet-heart.
My good man, Pierre, took foremost part
Through all;—an’t wilt, I’ll tell it thee;
As I have heard him oft repeat
The same, upon this hearth-stone seat;
Who now too sleeps.”

She paused a space,

The apron lifted to her face:
Smooth’d it, and sighed; but open’d not
Her story, ’ere was trimm’d the lamp:
Then, from a secret closet drew
Old letters, mildew’d with the damp
Of winters; tied with faded blue:—
Some books,—a lock of auburn hair,—
Tri-color’d ribbands in a knot;—
And a girl’s portrait, passing fair;

“These the inheritance, by right
Of who may chancely ne'er return
To claim them”——Far adown the night,
Ran the digressions of her tale ;
A journal leaf whose ink was pale ;
A pencil-note upon the marge
Of Dante, where lay dried a fern ;
Through everything that might enlarge
My knowledge of those lives, out-lined
In her dead husband's words—And straight
I copied all of that I read
And heard from her ; nor varnish'd aught ;
But caught the story 'tween the gaps
Of years ; as unto one a-bed,
Drift the hoarse night-cries in the lapse
Of wind a-down the street.

ELEONORE.

PART I.

—♦—

SOME eighty years ago, before

The hills of Gascony had rung

With other sounds than huntsman's blast,

Chasing down forest-paths, the boar,

And shots at wild birds wheeling past ;—

While men to feudal rights yet clung,

And the old system slept its last ;

And all was peace—or seem'd—between

The over-bearing banner's sheen

On castle-wall, and thin blue wreath

Of smoke, from the village roofs beneath—
 There stood a house in Gascony ;
(It stands there yet, may be), behind
A sweep of purple-mantling hills,
 Their sharp folds knotted 'gainst the sky,
While others, sloping down, in rills
Of vineyard greenness 'neath them wind,
 Into the wide and rich champaign,
Ruddy with upturn'd earth ; and gold
 Or purple-streakt, with vetch and grain :—
An ancient house, most desolate ;
 In-garden'd by espalier'd wall,
 Where over none might spy ; and all
Standing alone among the fields.
Here grew young Eleonore, a sad
 Uncared-for child, to girl's estate,

'Mong dusty banners, swords, and shields,
And little company beside.

The Count de Vaux, her father, had
No other child : they lived together,
With the old Countess Anne, his mother,
Caged in, with poverty and pride. . . .

All gone, save these few roods—made away,
Years back, at court, by the Count, in play ;

Who, since his gentle helpmate died,
Swept time away in sports of hound

And horse ; leaving to grow all wild
His rosebud in the unweeded ground,

His only child !

No knowledge had she of a fond

Mother's embrace ; and all she knew
Of the large world that lay beyond

That terraced wall, her fancy drew
From ballads old, and tales she read,
By moonlight, stealthily in bed.

When, if her grandam's shadow stream'd
Through open door, sleep-feigning, lay

The little maid, as though she dream'd ;
And with a slow and noiseless tread,

Enter'd a stately-presenced dame,
With jewell'd fingers : tall and grey
Who stared and slowly trail'd away,

As silent as she came.

Twelve quarterings, and a sinister-bar
Through fleurs-de-lys, on a field or

. . . This royal past, with the decline
Of fortunes in her blazon'd line,

The Countess dwelt on more and more—

But the proud blood, it was her boast,
Had coursed from generations far

Along her veins, was frozen round

The woman's heart ; and with it, most

Warm impulses that there abound.

One link of love, one tender bloom,

Alone kept green :—the son, on whom

Her pride had set itself to build

Their fortunes up ; but 't was her doom

Never to see these hopes fulfilled.

In his weak unambitious hand,

The stones all crumbled into sand.

O ! how she cursed the fatal hour,

In which, with shorten'd purse and land,

He led her home, whose only dow'r

Was a face, and a heart for love (not strife !)

Who, when three wretched years went by,

Faded and died, in giving life

To Eleonore. Then, once again

The Countess-mother swept her train

Unrivall'd !

To her distant bow'r,

Hung with strange, faded tapestrie,

Each morning, at the matin-bell,

Was the little maiden brought, to spell

A chapter : (one of pedigrees

Did best that lofty lady please)

To which some chronicle, or task

Of stitching in a tambour-frame,

Succeeded. Then the dame would ask

—As down the wall her finger went—

The blue-eyed child the rank and name

Of each proud ancestor, who frown'd
From the black pannel, 'scarlet-gown'd,
 And ruff'd ; or glinting in their suits
Of Milan steel ; Sir Hildebrand,
Who fought and conquer'd for Navarre ;
 And his stern spouse, Dame Milicent ;
Sir Gilbert, surnamed Bloody-hand,
 Spurr'd half a yard, in yellow boots :
And fair young Raoul, who outshone
Them all in valour—bravely done
In casque and plume : his motto, " Gare
 " A qui me touche."

 And after all
The lecture done, on meet deport
Of damsels, straight to the square-paved court
 Bounded young Eleonore with glee,

Where an old ger-falcon blink'd i' the sun—
Or sat with a hound on the terrace-wall,
Lapt in a faëry reverie.

Enchanted ground, though all-forsaken
And wild that garden was. The cup
A spouting Triton fill'd, though broken,
Held gold fish, floating in blue skies,
With island-lilies. To her eyes,
The marble Daphne, half-displaced
By laurels, which, in growing up,
Sent their strong arms around her waist,
A very goddess seem'd. Nor less
A joy was it to watch, in pairs,
With blue tails sweeping on the stairs,
Or spreading wide their hundred eyes

Of changeful green and golden dyes,
The peacocks, in their courtly dress ;
Who had out-lived its palmy days,
But yet clung fondly to the spot,
And peer'd each morn, with curious gaze,
Through broken windows, in amaze,
To find so little stir and rout.
Here ofttimes on the balustrade
She sat, and heard their shrill tirade
'Gainst the decaying times ; until
Across the sweep of purple wold,
The horn's "Tra-la" with cheerful swell,
Of the returning huntsman told ;
Who never fail'd, when day was set,
And weary with its toil, he fell
Booted and spurr'd, into a chair,

Before the fire, to call for her,

And lay his cheek 'gainst hers, and pass

His fingers through her golden hair.

It was not much perhaps, and it

Came only once a day, alas!

But being all she had of love,

The child lived for that twilight-time

Alone; listen'd for him, and strove

To meet his humour, and to climb

Yet nearer to his heart.

And so,

The world went by, and left them there,

A century behind, as 'twere.

. . . Old thoughts, old prejudices, modes,

All moss-grown, like the walls, I trow;

New-fangled doctrines, like new roads,

Came nowhere nigh them ; startling creeds
Of church and state, first mooted now,
Sent no strong winds among their weeds !
The stream damm'd up, and stagnate o'er,
Turn'd never a wheel.

Thus, Eleonore
From childhood slowly stept ; and years,
Which in her life work little change,
Expand the sweet bloom of her face,
Informing her presence with all grace
Of womanhood ; and her gentle mind
Carving more firm ; for to her tears,
And joys, was all heart-counsel strange—
And, like a sapling 'fore the wind,
Her soul at first sway'd to and fro.
Looking for some place to lean,

But finding no support below,
 Nothing tender, strong, and green,
It upwards turn'd, for heaven's own dew—
And so, more self-concentred, grew.

She was sixteen. About that time,
There came to that soft-winded clime,
And to that house, two friends : the one
 Far-spent in health. I only know
 Of his past life, that years ago
The Count and he were friends at court,
 Where flaunted rose-faced Pompadour ;
And wore her love-knots, drank, and fought,
 And on their swords fast friendship swore.
In memory of those days, he claim'd
 Hospitality for a night.

The other (in years, his son) he named
Gaston,—a Saul 'mong men for height,
Broad in the brow and chest, athlete,
 And sculptured in the countenance
 Like Grecian marbles, where no chance
Of colour comes, in cold or heat ;
With deep, unfathomable eyes,
 That seem to read each hidden thought
 In others, yet disclosed nought
Of joy, or anger, or surprise,
Out of their deeps. So gauzes drawn
 Across a city casement hide
 Keen watchers of the world below.—
Something at moments . . . Was it pride ?
Or flashes of a smouldering scorn,
 That shot from eye to lip, and ran

Athwart his face with lightning glow ?

I wist not—and that wasted man

Alone, perhaps, such looks could read.—

Dear as a father holds his son

He held him. . . . “In an hour of need,

While yet a youth, that right arm wrought

Rare service in the Pyrenees,”

He said ; and since then, “He had fought

Up steep Parnassus’ heights, and won

Wide fame : the universities

Had crown’d him. . . . Through the sore-perplex

Philosophy of German towns

His wit had steer’d, as through the vext

Dull questions of the Paduan gowns.” . . .

With garrulous pride he talk’d of him ;

And should one praise the form, he swore

The soul outshone its sheath ; and more
The manly grace of mind than limb.

Right welcome to that house were they.

The Count de Vaux had not yet lost

Convivial tempers loud and gay :

Albeit disused to play the host,

To kill fat sheep and entertain,

He urged the two friends to remain

Until the vintage. “ For,” said he,

“ My friends come seldom up this way.

They flock'd here in the days of old,

When the wine flow'd red, and the purse ran gold !

But not so now ; and here I lead

A cheerless life,—my old grey steed

And my little daughter for company.

Come ! under us there standeth yet

One cobwebb'd cask of Burgundy,
The last remaining. . . . Will you bide
A space ? We'll ease his bursting side
By a slit i' the vein, and drink our fill." . . .

No wine-bibber, he yet confess'd
Himself as nothing loth to stay,

The elder man ; and so, when press'd
By eyes more eloquent than lips,

The younger ; and sweet knowledge grew,
As blushing to the finger-tips,

She smiled out on the landscape blue,
For pleasure at his answer'd " Yea ;" . . .

While the two elder men sat by,

O'er lansquenet, full idly play'd,
Jogging each other's memory

To some stale jest court-wits had made.
But the stair that from her turret led
Creak'd rarely 'neath the Countess' tread.
She loath'd strange faces that came to pry
On their fall'n estate and poverty.
So where she listed, unmolest,
Went Eleonore, from rise to rest.

She was his guide in golden weather,
Among the woods and fields alone,
And hung upon his magic tone,
When by the light of stars they read,
 Bending over one book together,
With perfumed locks comminglèd.
(“ For is he not her father's guest ?
 Therefore is it meet,” saith she,
“ Ever to bear him company.” . . .)

And lo ! to this result it grew :
Each day, each hour, his presence blew
 Some new fresh impulse to her soul,
That struck out roots 'neath the green sod,
 And strengthen'd up, past all control.
And as its warmth and vigour spread,
Her mind expanded ; and she read,
 Through his discourses eloquent,
The writing of the hand of God
 On the star-letter'd firmament ;
With all the lesser truths of Time.
 Science her subtle stories lent ;
History, and the treasured lore
Of ages, was outspread before
 Her wondering eyes ; and the sweet rhyme
 Of the old poets rang their chime

Down his deep voice in mellowing falls :
Till all a-fire, with tears that stood
Taking her blue eyes' citadels,
The young girl's soul responsive burn'd,
And to the man himself she turn'd,
The breathing book of flesh and blood !—
Her heart's buds burst, and as she spoke,
She, from her double ignorance,
By little and by little, woke.—
Dreams took a real shape ; Romance,
And Chivalry, and Love came back,
As in the days of old. . . . A dawn
Had broken on the starless black !
She listen'd, and it seem'd her life
Could never more be as forlorn,
And fruitless, as it once had been.

—Her virgin heart put on its green,
 For all, the days with death were rife.

* * * *
 * * * *

Five weeks are past, and everywhere
 The vineyards now look brown and bare.
 The vines are stript, and trail around
 Their tendrils on the bruised ground.

The many feet have left the hill.

The house is silent : linger there

Those stranger-travellers still?

Another stranger with ice-cold hand

Is there : the solemn bell doth pass

A soul from earth—the last few grains of sand

Are shaken out of the hour-glass !

“ He might have linger'd a year or more,

But for that blood-vessel last night !”
And now, on dead limbs, the slanting lines
Of the setting sun through the casement pour ;
While without, through the trees, the eye defines
The vintage procession down below :
As 'gainst the sun they descend the hill,
And rioting through the village go.
The vintners all, like antique fawns,
Home-bearing in the skins of swine,
The blood-warm half-fermented wine.
With shadow before, and a ruby light
On the women's flaming bodices,
And sun-burnt necks—and grapes that are strung
On a bough, between two shoulders slung ;
While the voices of children, joyous-shrill,
With the tabor's clang, and sharp-rung horns,

Stream up in boist'rous choruses. . . .

I.

Sing, let us sing !

No harvest like that of the vine we bring ;

Ripen'd by August suns,

White grapes and purple oves,

Press'd in the vintage tuns.

Sing, let us sing !

II.

Sing, let us sing !

Laugh at the fears of our summer and spring !

Cold winds across the plain,

Red blight, and beating rain,

The grapes turn to wine again.

Sing, let us sing !

III.

Sing, let us sing !

The vine's blood is welcome to peasant and king !

Fruit of our summer's toil,

Child of our native soil,

Better than corn and oil.

Sing, let us sing !

*

*

*

*

Woe's me ! what mockery,
Sadder than passing-bell these sounds appear
To him, who standeth by the bier ! . . .
Recalling all the jollity
That once lit up the lifeless eye . . .
He shuts the lid down heavily.

* * * *
* * * *

A hush dwelt round about the house
All that day long. Who spoke, spoke low,
And, as though some slept, upon tiptoe
Trode the stair, and echoing corridor.
So still was it, that e'en the mouse
Ran boldly out across the floor,
Nor wist that one stood there, I ween.
But at the window, Eleonore

Leant out her aching head a-tween
Her hands : and lo ! behind her chair
Gaston, who, stooping to her ear,
Whisper'd,—and then a wilder knell
Tolling out all her life-hopes fell
“ To-morrow I must be far from here ! ”

PART II.

It is a chill September night,
The stars, though few, are burning bright,
And the moon shines on the terrace-wall,
Shiver'd with blackest shadows all,
From fruit-tree branches. Hand in hand,
 With eyes uplifted to the East,
Where Dawn's streak shows,—two figures stand:
And with troubled words, that e'er increased
 In tearful tenderness, one spake.

(The wind blew down in sudden strife

The red leaves o'er them.)

“ Happy are ye !

O birds, who lie about yon tree !

Can wing your ways at morn, and find

Your nest again at night ; and take

The blue sky lightly, as the wind

That lifts you. . . . O ! this life, this life !

It had been better not to wake

From that heavy dream to a long disgust !

Thou, Gaston, ah ! thou can'st not guess

The dull blank page of nothingness,

Life was to me—one time—and must

Be now again—no cares, but less

Than common joys—companionless—

Without one distant hope or aim

For the future. Now will Life ebb back
By days, to the day thou camest here,
And there must stagnate. Thou wilt flow
On to the storied world:—that sphere
Of learning claims its own, I know,
My heart has guessed it; though I lack
Right knowledge of thy future there.
And yet, methinks, I see bright dames,
In the splendor of a palace-room,
Waiting for one whose word is doom,
Whose love My girlish folly claims
Thy pardon, Gaston—O forget
My wild free speech; nor deem me bold,
That thus I speak from the full hold
Of sorrow. With the autumn-leaves
Made gold on the bough; and ripen'd sheaves,

Knowledge and friendship—day by day

Has grown—must it all now fall away ?

—Be swept, like the dead leaves coverlet
From our life's path ?” . . .

Swift, as a wave

Impell'd by rushing winds, he clave

The ripple of her low complaint :

His voice swept onwards, meeting faint

Resistance from her sobs and sighs.

The trembling palm between his own

He folded : then, with passionate tone,

All his heart up.

“ Dear Eleonore,

God give me strength ! . . . no more . . . no more !

These waters move to grievous wrong

All high resolves : I would be strong,

Unman me not with those streaming eyes.
Honor points through yon postern gate—
Too long have I staid: to hesitate
Were madness . . . He who is laid asleep,
 (Christ save his soul!) had it not been
For him . . . long ago . . . Nay; do not weep!
 Thou madd'nest me—God alone can tell,
 God, whose far-searching eye hath seen
Love brimming o'er the hearts' deep well
Each day, . . . all that I suffer—yet
Must I flee hence, and quite forget
Thee, and the blessed dreams that stood
 Like glory round my way.—O Curse!
 Worse than dishonour'd death, and worse
Than the despair of dumb or blind!
O Serpent, coil'd through heart and mind,

From my youth up, thy sting affords
No sharper pain than these few parting words !

To him, the maid : “ Where thou must go,
My heart will follow—but thy words
Round it, like evil shadows, press . . .
Kill not my hope . . . O, let it grow
Shaded by memories that cling
To the grandest, as the commonest thing
Taught me by thee ! For, wert thou dead,
 (And futureless parting were little less,)
Life’s color would indeed be fled ! ” —

“ Aye, hope : ” he said, and on her turn’d
Sadly ; “ for me, enough to know,
 Thy heart : that, when reviled and spurn’d,
 And spat upon by loathing men,

It still would shield my memory, though

The whole world should turn from thee then!

I tell thee truth, Girl! 'twould be so.

Women would tremble—mothers grasp

Their infants tighter in their clasp—

Should they but hear my curse:—to think

That they have sat with me, at meat,

And fill'd the cup for me to drink,

Or touch'd my garment, in the street!

'Mong friendships, haply, there be none

That would endure that test! . . . To thee,

(And here his passionate voice burnt down)

My heart kneels only therefore. . . . Thee,

Whom I would crown with lilies; Queen,

Bright and pure, in a heaven above me,

As Beatrice was by Dante seen!

Thou remember'st ? . . . So shall thine image shed
Its light henceforth. And if thou lov'st me,
Think of me, dear, as of one who is dead,
Yet whose soul is not beyond the reach
Of pray'r."

"What meanings, Gaston, hide
In these dark words ?"

He wildly cried,
"They mean—they mean that Life is a beach
Strew'd with the wreck of gallant hopes ;
Why cometh the sunshine, when the blast
Hath struck the bows, and split the ropes,
And shiver'd the main-top mast ?"
Once more, in accents sweet and slow
The young girl spake. "If thou must go,
O trust thy secret soul to me !

Where love is, knowledge need not fear
To enter, even though it wear
All shapes of horror. I am strung
 To any tune of misery.
Speak, therefore—though my heart be wrung
By thy discourse; its certain tone
 Will bring with it, to me, less pain,
Than it would to meet alone,
 Sick fancies and the shadowy train
Of doubts, that, in secret, haunt the brain.
Speak to me, Gaston.”

 There she stood
Tremulous, with the white lips parted;
The fresh rain on her cheek had started,
And lay there; and her earnest eye
Read into his for a reply.

“ Eleonore, be it so. I would

Have spared both me and thee,” he said.

“ Now hear.—*We two can never wed!*

Between us is a great gulf fixt,

Through which who sinks or swims, is dead

Alike unto the world. No hand

Of succour to the wretch, immersed

In its black poison'd wave :—for all,

The very meanest, poorest, shrink

From such, and stand upon the brink,

Pitiless ; their revilings mixt

With Scripture texts,—‘ Gehazi's own

Descendants,’ or the ‘ Wandering Jew's,’

Or ‘ Unrepentant thief's,’ they call

My race. . . . Now I, behold, unknown,

Have walkt a space this Christian land,

A thing its people hold accurst ;

A worm to crush beneath their shoes! . . .

I am a Cagot!”

A low wail,

Plaintive as the babe's, when first

It meets the world, in pain and travail,

Died on the night; and the thin trees

Shudder'd audibly in the breeze.

“ Ah! mother Cretias,” he groan'd,

“ Ah, mother, little did'st thou guess

By what long years of wretchedness

Thy sin, in me, should be atoned!——

——She was of that despised race,

Shut out from human sympathy,

But of strange beauty in the face,

(Thy woman's tears to her afford).

My father was a Provence lord,

He saw her at a mountain well . . .

(Christ pardon him and her) . . . but why

Continue? In a word—*She fell!*

Wild, passionate, and tender bosom,

In savage wasteness all alone;

What wonder that the silken tone,

Smooth touch, and soft eyes on her bent,

Undid her, . . . being different

From all that she had ever known?

. . . In time there blew the bitter blossom,

And in a cradle I was laid,

Of fallen berry, leaf, and thorn;

Her tawny fellows eyed with scorn

One of their loathèd race, betray'd

By courtly lips. . . Thus from my tribe,

With mother's milk, did I imbibe
Hate of injustice and of wrong,
And that blind hatred of the strong,
Oppress'd men have. And in the hills,
Companion'd by my secret thoughts,
Dwelt in that spirit-world, that fills
Wild plains with splendour as of courts ;
Until,—but of the rest thou know'st . . .
How noble that man was, whose ghost
He yielded to his God last night ;
How his heart's largesse infinite
Was pour'd on me ; and how released
From its narrow channel, my pent life.
This knowest thou " ———

He said, and ceased ;
'Toll'd in low sobs the young maid's grief

Out on the night : no other sound,

All Nature held its breath around.

He gasp'd yet once again. " Ah sweet,"

Weep not for me,—this life is fleet,

And I—a thing beneath thy feet—

How should I drag thee down—down—down
To my base level ? We must part,

I know, for ever : but do thou
Gather still closer round thy heart

Such love as may 'mong angels grow,
Stronger and purer ; till that day,
When all parting shall have pass'd away !

And if fond foolish memory clings,
Pleading for earth-hopes, do thou drown
Her flattering voice.—Be strong, my love.

Gird up thy heart for thy far home,

And learn, in the long years to come,
A courage to endure all things
With faith in the glorious End above !'

As drops the summer sun to rest,
His glorious face hid 'mong the trees,
Her golden head, by slow degrees,
Slid down upon his breast ;
Sobbing, " For ever,"—until, at last,
Unwittingly, his arms grew fast
Around her. . . . Beating hearts did meet,
And the lips answer'd.

Suddenly,

A shadow fell between their feet . . .
It quiver'd upon the ivied wall ;
It cross'd them like a funeral-pall :—

Up-sprang the maid : there leapt a cry
Into the night ; and then she saith
An Ave underneath her breath.

A skinny clay-cold hand is there ;
It weaves three fingers through her hair ;
A low laugh ripples on the air.

She turn'd one trembling look behind.
There, spectre-like, the Countess stood ;
Her eyes dilated, fleckt with blood,

Her grey locks tost upon the wind ;
And sinking down, the young girl spread
Her two arms round about her head,
Crusht to the earth.

“ I interrupt,
In a manner somewhat too abrupt,
This parlance. . . . Pardon me, I pray,—

Began the Countess, in taunting tone.—

“ Our house is well repaid, I own,

For its hospitality, that you deign

To hold love-passages with this

Unblushing girl. . . . Thou white-faced shame !

Did'st seal a contract with that kiss ?—

God strike thee dead upon the day

Our house were so dishonour'd ! . . . Pah !

Out on thee ! ”—Hoarse, her voice ran down

In whispers, like a serpent's hiss

O'ercharged with venom.—“ Thou art grown

Of the flesh and blood of thy base mother.

Would to God thou hadst ne'er been born !

For then ” . . .

“ Hold, madam, while I speak

These last words that may stir your scorn.

Beneath this roof, for many a week,
We two have met, and talk'd together,
Throughout long days, that in their flight
Look glimmering specks—unhinder'd quite
By you, her guardian. Are you so

Unlearn'd in man as not to know

The sequence? Why, if there be blame,
'Tis your's, that should have better kept

The key of her young heart, madam.

Take it again—the place is swept

Out clean. May it lodge a worthier guest!—

As for me, you have nought to fear;

Ere the sun breaks in yonder east

I shall be far away. My fate

Leans to a distant country, where

Men are more equal-handed. There,

Working unto some worthy end,
My name shall fashion, soon or late,
A story for itself, and bend
The old-world prejudice aside.
A day is coming, when the pride
Of birth shall tumble in this land,
And bite the dust. May I be there,
O God! to lend a helping hand."

To him, the Countess, eager: "Swear,
Thou foul-mouth'd braggart, ne'er again
To seek to pass these walls, on pain
Of whipping at the waggon's tail! . . .
Pshaw! 'tis a meaner varlet e'en
Than I had reckon'd on!" Her spleen
Rang out in laughter, sharp as hail;

But he, unmoved, said,

“ Do not crown

Your wrath with such hard terms, madam.

Threats are waste words ; I know no fear,
Arm'd with good purpose as I am :

And yet I do your will, and *swear*” . . .

He paused a space, and, looking down,
He caught the streaming eye, upturn'd,

Imploring him . . . “ *Never again,*

I swear, until the Castellain

Of these towers shall entreat

My presence, will I set my feet

Within their compass.”

As he spake,

Lights glinted all the garden through ;

And soon upon the gravel brake

Sharp footfalls in the frosty breeze,
And torches flash'd, and fell, and grew
Nearer and nearer in the trees.
Then hastily he stoop'd, and dropp'd
Unseen a parchment in her dress,
Whispering, "Should ever come *that day*,
And doubt, or danger, or distress
O'ertake thee, open this." Then stopp'd
To turn upon the chafing dame
With steadfast gaze.—"And now, madam,
The house is all a-stir, and I
Must pray you bid my host farewell,
And say the thanks I may not say."
With that he leapt the wall, and fell
Into the meadows, moonlit grey,
And so pass'd onward noiselessly.

PART III.



TIME, on his rosary, hath told
A year away : and once again,
The wheat is lifted from the plain,
The granaries are running gold.
And in that old house on the hill,
What changes hath the season wrought ?
Less grist has gone unto the mill,
And fewer hoofs into the Court.
But little change, till a bell in the night

Snapp'd all the dreams of yesterday!
The Count is dead. The branch that topp'd
That old ancestral tree is lopp'd
Suddenly off—and swept away!
On his old grey steed, that bore him well
So many years, i' the field he fell,
Like a warrior in the fight.
The huntsman cut down boughs of wood,
Made a litter, and bore him home:
Toilfully the hills they clomb,
All the green sticks dropping blood.
Up the path, to the château stair,
Smoothing their fears to a light-heart air:
Saying to those who wring their hands,
“'Tis a mere nothing—a broken limb”—
“Lo! he smiles” . . . (but the smile is dim,

And the sweat on his forehead stands)
The Countess to the steps came down,
In furrèd hood, and velvet gown,
A-tremble from head to foot :
She glared at one, and at the other,
“ Stand back, ye clowns, I am his mother !”
And tore off the bloody boot.
Then, at the sight, her stone-cold face
Convulsed ; and, reeling back a pace,
She fell, with passionate shrieks ! And they,
Through all her throes and struggles, led
Her far, into her tower, away.
But one pale shadow by the bed,
Nor wept, nor clamor'd,—only spread
The ointment on the lint ; and bound,
With skilful hands, the gaping wound ;

And only moved to wipe the damp
From his cold brow : and only spake,
To bid them leave the room, and make
Ready the midnight lamp.

The old hound and his mistress kept
Their vigil by that death-bed-side
All the night long ; and when he died,
They both still thought he slept !

Seems it a little thing that he,
With whom we held no sympathy
Of mind, in life—from whom, no thought
Struck fire in meeting ours—nor aught
Bound us together, but the great
Gift of our love in early days. . . .
That such should, on a sudden, die?—

That that strong heart should cease to beat—

That never, in this world, his gaze
Should meet us more,—nor his reply
Fasten our memory? . . . Ah! no,
Rude mind—rough manners—natural love—
We find too little here below,
For Death one fond heart to remove,
And we not feel the void.

And she

Mourn'd, as who love but few. Long-pent,
The springs rush'd to her heart's relief:

But soon she hid her sobs, and sought
To soothe, with gentle blandishment,
Her grandam's wilder grief;
For she was like a thing distraught,
A wild beast, robb'd of its young.

It was a terrible despair ;
She sat upon the ground, and wrung
 The white locks of her hair !
But in the mid-watch of the night,
Stealing down, noiseless, with a light,
 She came and stared upon the dead,
Out-lying on its linen white.
And the young girl who knelt in pray'r
 Arose, and took her hand, and said,
 “ O Grandmother, be comforted :
Remember, now he is at peace,
In a land where sin and sorrows cease,
And the weary, Grandmother, are at rest.”——
For all reply, she beat her breast,
With her thin hands : and walk'd about
The vacant chambers, in and out.

The horn and wassail-bowl were there—
 The platter, and the empty chair—
 The Drinker and the Huntsman . . . where ?
 Her foot meets something on the floor,
 She stoops—it is the boot he wore,
 Still saturated in the gore.

Pah! . . . She sicken'd and turn'd away—
 She bent her knees, and tried to pray—

—She thought she could remember part
 Of some Church-form—the words came not:
 The Pater-noster was forgot . . .

She was not used to pray, by heart!
 Then all her agony rush'd in

Upon her, and she cried aloud,
 “ Christ pardon me my sin!—
 I cannot pray—but I would die,

And rest a little in my shroud."

And he who doth dispose the ways

And the unruly hearts of men,

Answer'd her pray'r : but not then ;

Not in those fiercely-mourning days—

Not till she learn'd to put her trust

In that strong love that interven'd

Betwixt her sins and God, the Just ;

Not till her lofty mind, unqueen'd

Went sorrowing, in the dust !

And then she died ; full of great years,

If not of honor : for her fame

Went ill among the poor : the tears

That she had dried in life were scant,

And scant were those, they lent her name.

Hark ! from the belfry, jubilant,

The bells clang Christmas morning in !

Their sharp tongues follow in a din,

Clear-rung through all the early frost :

And as the men and women pass

Up the church steps, to early mass,

Each man his neighbour doth accost,

And ev'ry wife her gossip. " Aye,

And so I learn she's dead ! " " She died

This morning somewhat suddenly,

At the five-bells," a dame replied,

Important, as one who should know.

" Pardie ! " quoth one, in under-tone,

" Well, well, God send her peace ; so now

The little lady reigneth there

Supreme in the old place.

"Tis a mere child." "Just seventeen
Come Candlemas." "Aye, neighbour Pierre,
Mind you one day, some six years back,
How she, a thing with sunny locks,
Peep'd o'er the wall, with wondering e'en,
As we were driving home our flocks,
At shearing-time, across the fields,
And call'd and ask'd us for a drink
Of goat's milk, saying—'Here's a pink,
The best, good man, our garden yields,
Take it' ? I'faith, 'twas worth a crown
To hear the little lady speak.
Only last year I met her thrice
With that tall stranger who was down
Staying in these parts ; and twice
She stopp'd, and kiss'd my baby's cheek,

And once pass'd on and smiled." "Come, tell
Us something, Pernette (for thou know'st
More of these things than we can boast).

What is her future? will she dwell

Sole mistress of the vine and plough,

Or give us some new lord? and how
Should this betide us, ill or well?"

"A common scorn—nay, something worse

Old names may grow—a common *curse*,"

Was the village-oracle's reply,

In the dim speech of prophecy.

Each stared on each, and she pursued—

"Neighbour, if murrain seize your beast;

Should blight on flocks and grain-crops fall,

Ere the ripe summer sees your loss,

Look to the eyes that shine across

Your fields, from yonder turret-wall.”
A silence fell on them as she ceased ;
Thick-breath’d, with a solemn awe imbued,
 What might the Sibyl’s words portend? . . .
Some told their beads in tremulous falter,
 And cross’d themselves ; and some would bend
Their knee before Our Lady’s altar . . .
But once past on, the rumour spread
From mouth to mouth, with dark hints fed,
Light blown, as seeds before the wind,
 That take their root ere the hand wist
That it hath dropt any behind.
She, in her tower, poor lonely bird,
No jar of village voices heard :
But from the bars look’d out on grey
Froz’n fields, and shut her hands to pray,

All the long bitter Christmas-day.

The wintry sun smiled through in vain :

The frost-buds, blister'd on the pane,

 Would never thaw, nor would the poor
Struck heart, within. She sat and watch'd

 The notes dance down the oaken floor :
And all the robin-redbreasts, match'd

 In pairs, upon the leafless bough,
And mournfully she said, " Ah me,

 My kith and kin all buried now ;
Each thing in nature hath its mate,
I, only I, am desolate ;

Why should I any longer tarry ?

O, take me too, sweet Mother Mary."

But there arose, e'en as she spoke,

A little tremulous hope, that woke

Some sense of rapture in her heart,
And came, and went, and came again,
And would not quite depart.
Like fitful gusts of fresh'ning rain,
Over the summer-scorchèd plain,
And in this Nature judgeth best ;
That being young, and full of life,
We cannot pray to be at *rest*,
We pray to *live* : hope, in our breast,
Beats counter to life's cares and strife.
We sometimes try to drive this guest
Away, and say he is not worth
A place with his false tales ; but by
And by he comes again ;—for all
We lift our eyes to the blue sky,
Ere long they droop and droop, and fall

To the horizon of the earth,
Feasting in its green festival!

And so was it with Eleonore.
In the clock-tickings of the night
Her heart is stir'd; its eyes foresee
Fair pictures of the "yet might be."

It cheats her long day's languishment:
She argued whether it were right
To feed such dreams; but ever more
They grew, in spite of argument.

She glanced up at her long descent,
As she paced the length of corridor,
And question'd them, with eyes that spoke
Plainer than lips. Sir Hildebrand
He frown'd; his stern spouse pluck'd her cloak;

And Bertrand shook his "bloody hand"
I' her teeth. . . . She shudder'd all a-cold,
Then stopp'd and said, "Now will I hold
This for an omen true." She took
A pacc, and stole one fearful look
To the far corner of the room,

Where fair young Raoul held his place.

A sunbeam fell upon the face ;
He smiled out underneath his plume !
She fled along the corridor,

A triumph on her eye and lip :
All doubts—ah ! happy Eleonore !—

Resolved. Then from her breast, a slip
Of parchment, that had long lain curl'd
In its warm casket, draws, and reads

(The seals being brok'n) the name of one,

A merchant Jew in Paris town,
 To whom, in any urgent needs,
 A letter sent should, far or near,
 Reach *his* expatriate hands; and there,
 O' the other side, her pen must steer

Its trembling course. "I am alone.

'Tis night in this empty world.

My sun, rise up again!

Rise on my darken'd sphere—

Rise to this sphere—thine own.

Come! *for the Castellain*

Of these towers doth entreat

Thy presenee . . . and the curse is dead

For us, who stand alone here, Sweet.

The voices all around us fled!"

—When to the post-town, far away,

Across the plain, this word was sped
By trusty hands, without delay,
Her heart, uplifted from its bed,
And looking to the hopeful sky,
Went forward to a future day,
And so she waited patiently.

PART IV.



CONVULSION shook the land right through,

From end to end,—a people's cry,

That ever deeper, hoarser grew,

Sounding the tocsin "Liberty!"—

Till its echo swoon'd down the Western shore.

It reached her. She heard the far-off roar

Of Anarchy's dread march, unmoved,

As one, secure within a cave,

Hears the fierce murmur of the sea,

And the wild winds begin to rave.—

Those heavy-wingèd hours, at last,
 (So big in this world's history)
Brought him to her one night. 'Twas past
 The curfew; all the house a-bed,
(Pierre, and one agèd maid, who loved
Its old walls, like the birds;) save she,
Pale Eleonore, who sat and read
I' the Gospels, when she heard a clang
Of the long-rusted bell, that rang
Through the silent house. Her cheek lit red,
And her heart leapt up from its weary watch:

 She hurried down, with trembling hand
Unloos'd the chain, and raised the latch.

 She saw a shape before her stand,
And fell upon his neck! But lo!
Meeting his gaze, she started back,

And put the matted hair aside
From his pale wasted brow, and cried,
“What cruel change is here!” The cheek
Was sunken, and the smile was slow
To come, and shadow-like did flit—
No glory, as of old, in it!

But when he call'd her by her name,
The music that he used to speak
She found unalter'd. So they came
And sat down by the fitful light
Of embers, and talk'd down the night.

“Am I so alter'd? All,” he sighs,
“Suffers some change, save those sweet eyes.
The plans we make—the thoughts that grow
To be life's principle—undergo

Mutation ; and the way we read

Our future, most of all, dear heart !

Mine pointed 'cross the Atlantic chart

To a free-born land, where the bruised seed

Of my life should be cast ; when Fate hurl'd more

Than I dream'd, in storm-drifts, on this shore !”

—He spoke of that great social change

That was enacting ; how his heart

Stood up to watch the work, and how

Himself had play'd a foremost part,

In the great city's drama.—“ Strange,

How little of ourselves we know !”

He said. “ I had a dream that grew

Till it o'ershadov'd all my soul ;

Colour'd each thought, and shaped the whole.

It pointed how to frame a true, .

From the false systems of the past ;
That there should be nor first, nor last,
Throughout our land ; but reign Content
Over men's happy minds,—the fruit
Of honest laws, that constitute
Wise equal-handed government ;
No priestly factions of the state—
No party-cries to separate
A people—no gilt throne, upheld
By the thin hands of hungry men.—
The dream of good that I cherish'd then,
Is, little by little, dear, dispell'd ! . . .

“ I wander'd through the crowded street,—
I heard the city's great heart beat,—
Saw the dainty courtiers pass,

And palace-dames in gilded coach,
The least diamond from whose broach
Would have bought a score of meals,
For that wretched starving mass,
Muttering curses round their wheels!
The city rock'd and sway'd, like some
Titan in labour!—anguish-throes,
And groans upon the wild air throb;
Denunciations on its foes,
From the 'Apostles of the mob';
And when, at last, I heard a cry
'To arms!' my heart rang shrill reply.
The bosom of the streets was stirr'd
At early dawn, and heaved along,
One impulse urging all the throng—
'To the Bastile!' Saint Antoine heard

It, well prepared : from every door,
Grim-visaged men and women pour
Forth, with wild shouts, to seek for arms ;
Which found, they wave, like victory-palms,
Tow'rds the stronghold of tyranny.

—“ All that day long they fought, and I
Toil'd with the people,—axe in hand,
Help'd Louis Tournay at the gate,
And by the cannon took my stand ;
Nor left it till the Bastile's fate
Was sealed, with thunder-shouts. . . . O God !
'Twas a fearful sight to witness there.
The fierce tide rolling through the court,
Where, minutes past, the sentry trod.
Nor plighted faith, nor silver hair,

Avail him ; down the corridor,
Tumultuous with a thirst that nought
But blood can slake, they rush. . . . In
vain
I cry, and throw my myself before
Their gory pike-staffs ! ‘ Do not stain
With such foul deeds a righteous cause !
In Christ’s dear name, my brothers, pause !
The world stands by to see this day.’ . . .
But in that maddening tumult, none
Regard my words : the tide rolls on ;
And the thought of patriots there grown grey,
With the tortures, dragg’d from dungeon-cells
Like fuel to fire, feed their yells . . .
Already one is down ! . . . The hand
Which saved all Paris, when it reft

Away De Launay's lighted brand,

Held o'er the powder-store, is cleft!

Another falls. . . . Mine eyes grow dim . . .

Those hell-hounds tore them limb from limb,

Before they reach'd the Place de Grève.

Hardly could one poor veteran

My resolute remonstrance save"—

He shudder'd, and his deep voice ran

Down, like an unstrung instrument.—

“ That night I lay upon a stone,

Out in a moon-lit, place, alone;

Wounded and faint, my heart oppress'd,

The spirit yet refused to rest.

It cursed me for my part that day.

The dark-foreboding voice began,

‘Such tide, once free, may sweep away

All landmarks, for its Rights of Man!

What bloody tyranny,’ it said,

‘Is there like this unbridled will

Of a great multitude, self-led?

Owning no law for right, until

Some iron-grasp shall seize its fruit—

The will of one man absolute!’ . . .

“How I past thence I wot not; when

I woke to life, days afterward,

I lay in a poor chamber. Men,

Whose face was strange, stood in my sight,

And round my pillow, day and night,

Watch’d soul and body struggling hard,

Through Death's half-open door. At length,

By virtue of the precious balm

And oil of Christian love, which they

Pour'd into me, I rose ; in strength

Restored, in heart more strong and calm.—

While rumours thicken'd every day,

With crime outstripping rumour's pace,

And eloquent lips, that lent a grace

To the fierce contests in the 'States,'

Carried men's hearts, mine turned away

From these wild sophist-advocates

Of a destroying creed. As dear

The dream of freedom to me now,

As when, an outcast boy, I gazed,

With bitter longing, across the brow

Of my own hills to the plains below,

Where the castle frown'd :—but dim with fear
And doubt, this Future seemeth mazed !

“ At Versailles, in a perilous hour,

I saw the royal lady stand

Upon a balcony. The crowd

Had clamour'd for her, fierce and loud ;

Nor ceasèd till, with one white hand,

She waved her children back, and stood

Calm, resolute, alone, to face

The rage of a madden'd populace.

Shame-struck with her noble mien, there rang

Along that sea of heads a shock

Of heart-applause ; when (God be praised !)

Sudden the gleam of a fire-lock

Caught me, among the crowd, upraised ! . . .

A moment more—with tiger-bound,
And fury sharpening every fang,
Upon the craven wretch I sprang,
And dash'd his musket to the ground!

“ Long lifetime crowded into hours :
The swift unravel of a string,
For centuries knit fast, would seem
This day. From fever-heats of rage
To joy the people pass ; their king
Led captive to his palace tow'rs,
With ribaldry and sulliage,
And heads, as in an evil dream,
By drunken beldames borne before.
I wept indignant tears : there spoke
A voice within me, that awoke

The strong conviction more and more,
How, better than the sudden wrench
 Of a whole system, centuries old,
 Is the slow progress, taking hold
(Like ivy round a time-worn tow'r)
Of all the corner-stones that clench
The building, loosening all. But now,
 As men who in that tower await
The springing of a mine, and know
 That one and all must share its fate,
So stand we. . . .

 Weary, dear, am I
Of all these storms; and joyfully
 Caught I the word that, dove-like, flew
Into my bosom, and bore to me
Its green leaf o'er the dismal sea. . . .

Since when, such comfort shone in view,
As a white sail is, o'er the wintry main,
To the stranded in a hurricane!"—

Forgotten, for the moment, all
The sadness into which his soul
Was steep'd; with her warm hands again
In his, and reading down her eyes
The sympathy of her heart's replies.—

The sorrows that her year had brought,
In turn, she told him, voiced with sighs;

Till whispering thus, the sunrise caught
Them slantwise through the oriel glass.

The little household 'gan to pass

Downstairs, and circle through the place.
And everywhere the bars they found

Withdrawn ; till, wondering, they came
 To where those two, in half-embrace,
Sat in the window-seat together.

The tale that morning went its round,
 Ere 'twas another hour old :
The farm-maid, tripping o'er the heather,
 Set down her milk-pail as she told
The goat-herd, and the gossip-dame,
 At open door ; until, at last,
The village bee-hive was a-stir,
 Buzzing with anger : foremost led
By Justice, who, in wicker chair,
 Portentous, shakes his awful head,
And takes his snuff, and hints at crimes. . . .
“ A firebrand of these troubled times,

Perchance,—God hold us clear of such!”

Then, veering on another tack,

“The maid is young,—the scandal much.”—

Cried one, “Like a ghost, he cometh back!”—

“Like a robber vanish’d!” quoth another.

“I mind me, that night, the Countess-mother

And little lady were found together

By the garden-wall.”—The Sibyl said,

“Mind you my word, sirs? Should she wed

That man, far better she were dead!

Does not the look of him congeal

Your heart’s blood? Did you never note

Those lengths of hair, that quite conceal

His ear-lobes, falling to the throat? *

He comes of the accursèd race!

No need of ‘*duck’s-foot*’ with *that* face—

* *Vide* Note.

Such face the Devil lends his own,
To snare fond-hearted women!" . . . Thence
Sharp rang the arrows of their talk,
Feather'd with superstitious fears.
Some were for stocks; and spake their saws
How Cagots had, in by-gone years,
Spread wide contagion in their walk:
And Justice quoted feudal laws,
For punishment of like offence.
So chafed and fretted through the day,
In village counsel, that sage band;
Till night laid on a healing hand,
Hiding their feverish cares away.

* * * *

They look'd each other in the face.
He said, " Can you endure disgrace,

And share the shame of all my race ?
Thine ancient home for evermore
Forsaking ? O, think well before
You strike the chord that gives the key,
Wherein a woman's history
Is thenceforth to be play'd. At best,
A stormy perilous life,—no rest,—
 A life of poverty, toil, and scorn
Must ours be. Say, doth happiness
Blow this way only ?”

Her low “ Yes !”

Trusting and tender, firm and clear,
Rang hopeful to his listening ear,
 As joy-bell on a marriage morn.

He urges swift and secret flight ;

'The people's voice hath grown each day

Louder, and ev'ry hour's delay

Thickens the ferment. So that night

She left her home, and through the door

Pass'd outward—to return no more !

He bore her in his rugged fold,

Tender to clasp, but strong to hold,—

A jewel, set in clamps of gold.

She, unresisting, pale and calm,

Scarce breathing, on his bended arm. . . .

Thus they fled out across the hill,

Past the old churchyard, past the mill,

And through the village. All was still.

Midnight and more ; for every light

Along the street had wink'd " Good-night !"

The fields look'd cold and wintry white ;

No sound, save in the frosty grass,
 That crackles sharply as they pass ;
 No jealous moon ; no blood-hound's bay ;
 Nothing betrays their flight,—till day
 Wakes up, and they are far away ! . . .

Only an hour or so, behind,
 (For clanking hoofs will take the wind,
 And so 'tis counted best,) rides Pierre,
 Upon his master's old grey steed,
 Tight clenching in his tremulous hold

Things deem'd the fittest for their need.

A silver goblet, and a gold,

Are slung upon the saddle-bow :

The old man sighs to think his task,

Of polishing each quaint-wrought mask

Upon their sides, is done ; for all

Is vague. . . . Of future, what knows he ?
He only knows, whate'er befall,
His future at her beck must be.

Prick on, thou brave old man ! nor draw
The rein. There, where the steep road turns,
She waits thee, 'neath a chesnut-tree,
White as the hoar-frost, choked with fears,
As are her moisten'd feet in ferns,
Wherein, knee-deep, she stands,—their spears
Bristling, frost-silver'd, round her. He
She leans on, with his suasive tones,
Sustains her faint heart, till she hears
The far hoofs clattering o'er the stones !

Ere morning breaks, full many a league

Upon their world-wide road are they.
She, wrapt in mantles, on the grey,
Her hand in his ; until fatigue,
After the long night-hours, doth creep
Over her eyelids, with the chill
Of morning vapours, up the hill.
Here, looking downward from a steep,
Where rolls a sea of mist below,
Between the cloud-waves' fall and flow,
The eye may, for a moment, strike
Some sharpen'd spires,—not all-unlike
Spars of a wreck upon the main,
Seen, and then swallow'd up again.
There shall they rest a space ; and there,
The words that make them one are spoken,
Underneath those pointed spires,

Solemn words, more sweet to her
Than the music of the quires ;
 Fraught with life's intensity.—
On her finger is the token,
And the priest between them stands ;
 But their hearts are knit more firmly
Than the folding of the hands.
 Through summer-shine and winter weather,
They shall watch life's shifting sands,
 Standing on a rock together !

PART V.



OVER the purple hills, and down
By storied castles on the sea,—
Past the dark homestead,—through the town
New woke to cry of “Liberty!”—
Across long reaches of grey land,
Stretching for many a mile away,
By the straight rows of poplar spann’d,—
That happy marriage-journey lay.
Each heart to each drew nearer still,
For all the storms that raged without,

The echo of a nation's shout,
Booming from hill to hill !
At length, upon a tideless shore,
O'er the lips of France, they reach'd a spot,
So folded from the world away,
That hoarsest murmurs reach'd it not
Of the storm, grown louder day by day.
Here linger'd they a summer-while
Of perfect peace, within the smile
Of the calm ocean, loth to merge
Again into the troubled surge,
That rock'd the country. And, in time,
A child was born to Eleonore,
Among the fishing-huts.—She wore
(After the dim and ghost-like fears,
Haunting her through long silent weeks)

Thanksgiving smiles, when, on her breast,

The smooth fair bud unfolded lay,

Without a canker-taint. . . . Dear guest!

In that small cradle, o'er him they

Both leaning, how the future years

Shone with fresh hopes in those round cheeks!

Up in the hills, beset with wood,

A small half-ruined chapel stood

Not far from there,—a lonely place,

Where remnants of his out-cast race,

From their bleak mountain-huts, were wont

To gather, like the morning-mist;

Though now no more the bell persist

Its matin-call, to kneel before

God's altar. E'en the narrow door,

Through which they erst had crept, was gone.
And all distinctions of the font,
And tribune, crumbled like the bone
Of them, who lay beneath those flat
Carv'd tombstones, which their sons had made,
From out the shatter'd chancel-flags.—
And here, at sunset, oft delay'd
Gaston and Eleonore, and sat
Upon the lichen-broider'd slags.
And oft he said, “When I am dead,
Fain would I rest here, where none pass
With restless feet, nor use vain forms ;
Nor clash the frequent city spades ;
No more stir is, through mould and grass,
Than the crawling of the secret worms !” . . .
—Then hers was it, with blandishment,

To chase the fleetly-passing shades
From Gaston's brow; and as they went
Homewards, a-down the rock-hewn stairs,
The harvest-moon ne'er shone upon
Two faces, peacefuller than theirs!

* * * *

Brief, transient dream! Man's heart, that ne'er
Inactive sleeps—its virile springs
In rust, for long—began to wear
Impatient for those battle-fields,
Where pend the destinies of kings,
And the unsolvèd problem yields,
At length, such unmistakable
And thund'rous answer. O'er the seas,
Fishermen, trading from Marseilles,

Drop tidings of that fiery town ;

 Pedlars from 'cross the Pyrenees,

With smuggled arrack, gear, and gown,

Feed greedy list'ners ; and the tale

Is of the aristocrats borne down

 By popular fury—massacred,

 Without a judgment—many fled

 To distant countries : how, all rent

By faction, into rival bands

 And clubs, the patriot strength is spent.

Each day more fierce, with bolden'd hands,

 The people lift the clarion shrill

To blood-stain'd lips, and hoarsely blow

Defiant :—nay, some think they will

 Fling, as a champion-gauntlet's hurled,

A king's head down to the shuddering world ! . . .

Shall he sleep on, and take his rest,

When such things are? O, gallant heart!

Couldst thou foresee the end, 'twere best,

'Twere wisest so. . . . What! stand apart,

And see our land devour'd by flames?

That cause, where centred all life's aims,

Become a scourge most damnable,

Unmoved? . . . Sweet dream of peace, farewell!

France calls on ev'ry patriot true

To aid her, this death-struggle through.

And fired with that wild hope men call

"Great," should it prosper, and deride

As "worse than folly" if it fail,

He left that port, embarking all

Most dear in life, with shorten'd sail,

To shoot the rapids, and to stem—
 If may be—that destructive tide.

But God, for His great ends, had will'd
 A mighty tempest, that should blast
 The States' foundation,—nor be still'd
 By a vain voice upon it cast.

* * * *
 * * * *

Royalty, through its prison-bars,
 Leans, spectral. Self-sown heroes grow,
 And are cut off,—now up, now down,
 Like poppets in a raree-show :
 Strange sights, God wot ! amid the jars
 And shocks of heated Paris town :
 Where unloosed passions make a hell

Of the brief days men here are given,
To reach through earth-mists up to heaven !
—'Mong such, her lot is now to dwell :
And all the woman's change she made ;
 The powder shaken from her hair,
And stuffs, instead of rich brocade,
 Unmeet for citizen's wife to wear.
In the black narrow street, up high,
 Through windows, where the roar and din
 Of distant crowds roll'd faintly in,
Him absent, watch'd her anxious eye,
Through silent hours, till darkness fell ;
Then, by her baby's cradle sate,
 Singing low songs,—the while her thoughts
Are in the storm-heats of debate,
 That tardy his return. So days,

Outwearying all the heart's resorts
For comfort, wore to months : her face,
Each night-watch paler with increase
Of care, lit up his home-returns
With smiles that died quickly out. Her eyes
Look'd vainly into his for peace.—
No peace for him ! He sees the fate
Of best and bravest in the state ;
The popular idols erst, on whom
The popular wind now keenly blows,
Offer'd, by turns, a sacrifice
To the fickle god,—and he foreknows
This must be, in the end, his doom !
Already round that vent'rous bark
The wild winds howl,—the blood-waves rise—
A Deluge, with no saving ark ! . . .

Before, behind, where'er he turns,

Death fronts him with the martyr'd men,

Their glory gather'd into urns—

All, all alike their factions then !

One fate, for Girondins or Reds,

Awaits them, be it soon or late ;

Same that in this September hurls

Its royalists, its gallant Corps

De Garde, non-juring priests, and girls,

Out on the howling sea of heads,

That foams around the Abbaye gate. . . .

Terror's reign spreads ; and Eleonore

Each day, through that small open square,

That lets in God's own sunshine, sees

And hears enough to blanch her hair ;

When to their God the prisons pour

Their day's libation to the lees, . . .

 Condemn'd, in tumbrels rattling by,
Brave-faced, to pitiless mobs behind,
 With song, and oath, and ribaldry,—
Or haply prayers from blister'd lips,
Eyes gleaming wildly up, and slips
Of linen, scrawl'd in blood, to fling,
With heart-petition, to some kind
Face at a window pitying!—

The Guillotine! the Guillotine!

Omnipotent and ruthless queen!

 What dost thou in this People's cause?

 —Cause of Fraternity—that strives

For justice to the long-oppress'd . . .

Despotic queen, with iron crest,

And sceptre-strokes that cleave men's lives !

Must Patriotism thus devour

Her children, Saturn-like, with jaws
Of such untiring gust and power ? . . .

Then ebb'd and flow'd that one dread week,

Its minutes boom'd in thunder-sound—

Then fell the stroke that echoed round

All Europe with a dismal shriek.

From palace-roof to scarpèd rock,

Reverb'rated the earthquake shock. . . .

Thrones totter'd,—upon monarchs' brows

Their crowns weigh'd heavy (as the vows

Of shipwreckt murderers),—and wise

Statesmen, with horror-smitten eyes,

Through avenues of time, descried

The long results of Regicide !

* * * *

One night, with nervous strides, that shook

The narrow chamber, up and down

He paced in silence—up and down,—

While Eleonore rock'd that little life

To healthful sleep the while. He took,

Sudden, a pace towards her chair,

Push'd with both hands the golden hair

From off her brow, and spake. “ Dear wife,

I feel the hour when we must part

Is not far off, but, sweetest heart,

Be not cast down ; a time of bliss,

Perfect, as few have known, was this

Of ours, in what of inward glow

Keeps outward chills away. And now

'T must cease ; it was a glimpse of heaven
Lent us before our time, it seems :

So bright a glimpse, that e'en in dreams,
Fore-shadow of it ne'er was given.

Now it must cease a little space . . .

Fleet years thy fond heart shall employ

In training up our infant boy

To a steadfast faith. My own is strong,

I do believe we shall, ere long,

Meet, ne'er to part. God doth but lift

His earth-cloud from this human face.

Thanks be, for this divinest gift

Of faith; unswerving through dark days

Of infidelity. I join

Death's armies with an unblencht mien ;

I have pray'd by night, and striv'n by day

To work that counterpoise, that must
Succeed to this inhuman fray ;

And men rise heroes from the dust.

I shall not see it ; but I know

That day will come :—for, look you, Time,
Like the just earth, with workings slow,
Brings every fallen fruit to prime—
Though unseen, to the ground it drop,
It germinates the Future's crop.

Not vainly then the green sod drinks

Our life's blood (if it must be so) ;

Already, sheer exhausted, sinks

This land, drencht with her children's blood.

Soon the strong Principle of Good,

Arising from its fallen state,

Shall of the very stones create

New children, as Prometheus' son,
The mythologic Nöe, raised. . . .

Let our boy, Eleonore, be one

Of these ; and see he read the past
Aright, with no false beauties phrased.
Learn him true lessons : lift the man

Above all petty strifes of caste :
Teach him with earnest eye to scan
The horizon : and so school his heart,
That he may act a hero's part
In this life-drama. . . . Dear wife, thou
My sole inquietude art now.

And now the past seems crime in me,

To have robbed thee from thy quiet nest,
And flung thee forth on this rough sea,
With thy little fledgling. . . O, my best,

T'were vain to tell thee not to weep,
At first: as vain to bid thee keep
My memory green through life, with pray'r;
But not for ever, I beseech,
With tears. . . Hark!—" suddenly his speech
Was broken by a noise—a tramp
Of feet, upon the wooden stair;
A clash of pikes—a confused hum
Of voices, with the voice of Pierre
In protest; and the door-chink 'neath
Stream'd the red arrows of a lamp.
Then with averted brow, and breath
That labor'd up, he said—" They come!
I had not look'd for this so soon." . . .
Her arms dropp'd stiff—she saw the door
Burst open—and the tricolor

Ribbands—and lamp-lit pike-heads flash—

More she knew not—could nothing tell;

For, with a dull and heavy crash,

Mercifully shot (as it seem'd),

Right to the very heart, she fell

Across the cradle, in a swoon,

Where peacefully her baby dream'd.

* * * * *

O hearts, that have outlived, alone,

Griefs wilder far than Love's first rave,

Where found ye strength to suffer on,

With the dark comfort of the grave

Denied? How bore the cold, when shorn

Of all love's warmth, through long years'

flight?

To whom noon brought no solace, none

Grey evening : and still less when God—

Parting the dark locks of the night,
From the clear forehead of the morn,
Glad sounds of wakening life, from bird
And sheepfold, smote the anguisht chord
Afresh, like an insulting word.

But Eleonore, in her despair,

Was not alone ; the rosy small
Mouth at her breast, with ceaseless call,
'Plain'd of its spring's embitter'd taste ;
And with the fear her babe should waste,
The mother roused her, and drew thence
Strength to live on from day to day—

To eat—to drink—to breathe the air—
And then, a sudden strength to pray—

Write letters—stand, with tear-worn cheeks,

Patient at prison doors, through weeks
Of death-like horrible suspense.
It ended, and she knew the worst ;
 The long-expected message found
 Her crusht, as a leaf upon the ground,
That once was full of light and thirst.
He died as he had lived : a true
Fine Christian courage bore him through
From first to last ; no impious boast
 Of holding Heav'n to be a myth,
 Nor fearing Death nor Hell, wherewith
So many yielded up the ghost ;
But a grave comfort to sustain
His comrades, in the last hour's pain.
And thus he met the brutal crowd ;
 Could view the storm of heads below,

With grand forgiving sorrow, past
Father's for sons : and when, at last,
 His eye lit on the anguisht brow
Of Pierre, he, beckoning, said aloud—
 “ Tell her my latest thought is hers ;
 My life is all my country's now.” . . .
These, his last words ;—a minute more,
The man had ceased to be ; and when
 The mob, being gluttet, to disperse
Began, that aged servitor
Obtain'd, with prayers and much gold,
 All that was left of him : in death
Still beautiful ; where, on the lip,
 The soul shone out, with its last breath.
This, secretly, to a little ship
 Down on the river he convey'd ;

Then came, and to the widow told

How all her order was obey'd.

Far from the hateful city, they

Travell'd that night ; and with them bore

The empty shell—the darken'd lamp,

Whose light had pass'd to cloudless day.

Up in the forest-hills, away

From all the hideous roar and tramp,

And bloodshed, they are gone ; her child,

And faithful servant, self-exiled.

There, to the spot where she had spent

Her midsummer of heart's-content,

And where, so often he had said,

He fain would lie, when he was dead,

They brought him, and they dug his bed.

Hard by, upon the hill they made

Their dwelling ; well the mountaineer
Knew her sweet face, through summer shade
And winter snows, unwearying here.
And as the babe began to lisp
His “ Pater-nosters,” and to find
The first spring violets ’mong the crisp
Red leaves around the boles, and bind
And shape them into stars and lunes,
Upon his father’s length of grave ;
And lift his little voice in tunes,
And catch the notes his mother gave. . . .
No morn, but found her with her son,
Making devoutest oraison ;
And every eve their hymns uprose,
With prayers for the soul’s repose
Of the loved, from spiritual foes.

No altar, rich with pious gaud,
 Woo'd them to pray'r; upon the cross,
 Proud in its heraldry of moss,
The full-blown moon her whiteness pour'd ;
No quire, as in cathedral piles,
Flatter'd the air ; but through green aisles
Of trees, that arching over, clomb
As it seem'd, to a star-encrusted dome,
Uprose their voices eloquent ;
The full voice and the small voice blent ;
Apart in tone, yet well agreed
 To one tune, as they Heav'nward grew,
 Like a deep stream, discoursing to
The pipy sweetness of a reed.

I.

Sancta beata Virgiue,
 Back to the grave whose mould, each spring,
 Quicken new hopes, our hope we bring,
 His face is hid ; his spirit's wing.
 O may it rest,
 Mother of sorrows, on thy breast.
 Dona illo requiem, O Domine !

II.

Sancta beata Virgine.
 Raised to thy throne from this dark place,
 Pray that for him be short the space
 From death, to God's eternal face ;
 Where sorrows cease,
 And all things, save eternal peace.
 Dona illo requiem, O Domine !

Peace to the living, as the dead

This daily service, haply, brought ;
 That holy peace so coveted
 O' the mind, with tension overwrought.

Long-storied by the poor, she led

Her tranquil round of duties ; housed

In that small hostelrie, whose purst
And comely dame old Pierre espoused.

Thus bloom'd and waned the years. At first
Grief had so tutor'd her to look

For little else within the book

Of life, that on each opening page,

Her finger trembled with presage

Of evil : but a gradual joy,

A sun-set glory round her spread,—

Deepening down to gild the last
Lines, which her fading eyes should read,
Of its stern chapters. In the boy—

His noble brow—his fearless eyes,

That drew their color from the skies—

She read the story of her past.

She saw that distant day anew,

When other eyes, as darkly lasht,

(Like fire 'neath forest-boughs) that flash'd,

And fell with scorn of things untrue,

First look'd on her. The voice that broke

Her charmèd sleep long years ago,

Like prince's fairy-horn, new woke

In echoes seem'd. That they should grow

Loud, on her stripling's forward way,

Is now her hope; that he should learn

The undying principles that burn

In great men's hearts, her care. She knows

That scarcely shall her life outspan

His boyhood, (waxing day by day

More weak); and as the hope draws near,

That her pilgrimage is ending here,
The cross grows light.

She lived to see

The first faint outline of the man,
Her hope had pictured: then she died,
A happy, tranquil death, upon

His arm; and in those loving eyes,
Faith in God's future for her son.

He laid her in the bed beside

Her well-belov'd: that home which she

Longed for in life, the grave will be—

A quiet home—whose heavy door,

Once shut, no sound may enter more!

So far the substance of the story,

From end to end. Five lustres now

Had pass'd, she said : the boy's fair brow,
Dusken'd on Egypt's burning sands,
Had earn'd, in the great Captain's bands,
A crown unto itself—a glory,
By the light of which men read his name,
In this hereafter-time. The flame,
That burn'd in his ancestral Goth,
(Or Saracen, no matter which),
Yet unextinguish't in the Frank,
Shot sparks along the buoyant froth
Of the young hero's spirit. So
He rose in honour, fame, and rank :
And from the ravaged Lombard plain,
From Moscow's fires, and blood-stain'd snow,
In the lapse of war, return'd again,
And again, across the blue-peakt hills,

Down to the little bay, that fills
The ripple of a tideless sea,
There to her village hostelrie ;
And standing 'mong the ferns and heath,
Beside those quiet mountain-graves,
With thoughts on the true hearts beneath,
His soul more brave and constant grew,
To battle with Life's crested waves ;
As though, through all the foaming blue,
He felt their loving hands, that drew
Him up, unto the peaceful shore,
Which they have reacht,—and weep no more !

NOTE.

It may be well to say a few words of the proscribed race to whom reference is made in this Poem,—a race, concerning whom more ignorance and superstition existed in France during many centuries, and up to a period nearly approaching our own times, than has, perhaps, its parallel in history. Popular prejudice regarded the Cagots as lepers; they lived apart from the rest of the community, with whom they were strictly forbidden to marry, or indeed to associate. There was hardly a trade they might exercise, save that of woodcutter and carpenter. They were not allowed to draw at the common well, for fear of infecting the water. They were compelled to wear a scarlet mark in the form of a duck's foot upon their breasts, whereby they might be recognised and avoided. In many of the old churches is still to be seen the narrow door, gallery, and basin for holy water, dedicated to their use. Nor did the loathing they inspired terminate with life. Their very graves were separated from the rest; as though even the dead feared their contamination. Yet, strange to say, there is no evidence of any hereditary curse, either mental or physical, having belonged to this unhappy people. They have often been confounded

with the Crétins of the Pyrenees (by M. Ramond, among others, in his well-known work). But that they were a very different race, not unfrequently distinguished for courage, athletic prowess, and even beauty, we have abundant testimony to prove. "Né dans le Béarn," writes M. Hourcastremé, "J'y ai connu cent Cagots; mais nul d'entr'eux n'avoit ni goïtres, ni la jaunisse. J'y ai, au contraire, observé des hommes bien faits, vigoureux; et surtout des femmes, qu'on eût mis au nombre des plus belles, s'il eût été question d'objets de comparaison." That among small knots of families, closely intermarried, and herding together in misery and squalor, there should be occasional instances of imbecility and of distressing bodily disease, is not surprising. M. Guyon, in his paper on the subject, addressed to the Académie des Sciences, describes the Cagots as "une race de taille élevée, et parfaitement conformée:" he considers that where instances of goïtres and idiocy occur among them, it is consequent on the unhealthy localities they often inhabit; but he confirms the belief that they have generally some peculiar formation of the ear, and this he holds to be one of their distinctive characteristics. The origin of the Cagots has been the subject of much learned research and discussion. The oldest and most popular tradition made them to be descendants of the Goths, who were put to flight by Clovis after his victory over Alaric in the plains of Vouillé, and who were said to have taken refuge in the

mountains of Béarn. The name of Cagot (chiens de Goth) is one of the arguments in support of this, which its upholders bring forward. Another theory, propounded by Pierre de Marca, in his 'Histoire de Béarn,' is, that they were a remnant of the Saracens, whose lives were spared by Charles Martel, after his victory over Abdirama, upon condition they would embrace the Christian religion. The older designation of *Crestiaas* (chrétiens) which they bear in all edicts, histories, and ballads up to the sixteenth century, is one of the props to this opinion. It must be observed, however, that M. Michel, who, in his 'Histoire de Races maudites,' takes a different view from any of his predecessors, suggests that the name of *Crestiaas* may have been applied to the Cagots from the fact of their wearing a badge or *crête*, (*eresta* in the Basque language). It is not difficult to trace the etymology of another term of opprobrium, *Gezitains*, by which they were commonly known. It was believed that they were descendants of Gehazi, the lying servant of the Prophet, to whom the leprosy of Naaman was ordained to cleave for ever. Thus, too, in some districts, there was a tradition in reference to their long-established calling as carpenters, that they had been originally Jews and were descendants of those who made the Cross of Christ. It would be endless to attempt to give an account of the various opinions that have been upheld, from time to time, respecting the Cagots. M. Michel, the latest of those who have directed their attention

to the subject, believes them originally to have been Spaniards, who, after assisting Charlemagne during his expedition into Spain, fled from the vengeance of the victorious party, to be under that monarch's protection, when he recrossed the Pyrenees. If M. Michel's arguments are not conclusive, they are at least as good as many of those adduced by Messieurs de Belle-Forest, de Marca, and Ramond. But the question is one that will probably remain open to discussion till the end of time.

As early as the seventeenth century a law was passed protecting the person and property of Cagots from injury; and during the succeeding hundred years, we find several other laws tending to remove their civil disabilities, and to ameliorate their condition. The very frequency of these laws proves that they were not wholly effectual in removing the prejudice that existed against the Cagots, but it was probably only in remote districts (such as one where the early scenes of this Poem are laid), that the virulence of popular hatred still existed in full force, at the period of the French Revolution. Even subsequently to that event, (when the Cagots "improved the opportunity," to destroy most of the monuments that designated them as such, and necessarily became more mixed up with the rest of the population,) there were districts where the old traditional superstitions did not give way. At Baztan, on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees, there were families, only a few

years since, who were regarded with reprobation as of Cagot extraction, and the Spanish Government found it necessary, in the year 1817, to pass a law for their protection, and to prohibit the use of the injurious term of "Cagot." The distinction is becoming rarer every day: what the law could not effect, intermarriages have gradually done. The individuality of the Cagots as a race is lost.—Little more is left than the name; that, we still occasionally find in the Pyrenees: one of the last remnants of the middle-age, drifted, as it were, to the threshold of our own time.

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE BATTLE.



I.

I LEFT my tent at midnight,
And stood on a little hill,
The moon burn'd red in heaven,
And the camp lay husht and still :

II.

Save by the hourly tramping
Of the picket on its beat,
The sentinel's sharp challenge,
As he paced the canvass street.

III.

The hour, from one to another,
 Cried with a clear "All's well!"
The curse of uneasy dreamers,
 Tossing with shot and shell.

IV.

All else was frosty-silent :
 I thought on to-morrow's fight ;
How, when its heat was over,
 Would return the quiet night ;

V.

And I wonder'd "Will those white tents
 Be shining there the same?"
Then slowly riding through them,
 A sable horseman came.

VI.

Clad in the ancient armour,
His vizor closed he kept,
Unchallenged by the sentinel,
Full in the moonlight swept.

VII.

His charger's hoof, I marvell'd much,
No ringing echo sent.
Sudden the horseman rein'd him up,
Before my captain's tent.

VIII.

I spake in fear, "What art thou?
Nor Guardsman, nor Dragoon,
That ridest thus in armour clad,
Under the midnight moon?"

IX.

Then sigh'd a voice in answer,
Between his vizor's bands,
Like wind among the rushes,
Along the river's sands :

X.

“ My name,” he said, “ thou knowest,
My face shalt one day see ;
I come to choose the gallant men
Who to-morrow ride with me !”

XI.

I cried (and from my forehead
The drops of anguish fall),
“ O Rider ! now I know thee well,—
Thou who o'ertakest all,

XII.

“ Or soon or late :—but *that* brave man,
O let him ride the plain,
To cheer his troop from battle back,
And lead them forth again !”

XIII.

The Horseman sigh'd for answer :
His charger rear'd apace ;
Like sea-spray, as he snorted, flash'd
The foam-flakes by my face.

XIV.

Then, on a little further,
I heard him say to one,
Who slept the sleep of sweet eighteen,
“ Before to-morrow's sun

XV.

“ Sink, with the tide of battle
In scarlet o’er the town,
Meet me in yonder hollow,
When the Cossack charges down.”—

XVI.

“ O spare, at least, *that* boy !” I cried,
“ Life’s ride has just begun
For him, so full of life and pride—
His mother’s only son !

XVII.

“ A widow she, who liveth
In his letters week by week ;
News flasht along the wires
Of this fight will blanch her cheek,

XVIII.

“ Thro’ days of anxious watching,
Till she learn the list of slain.” . . .
The Horseman shook his mournful plume,
The charger toss’d his mane.

XIX.

Then to a distant watch-fire,
Where Highlanders stood round,
And one, his head upon his hand,
Sat, thinking, on the ground,

XX.

Wrapt in the plaid of his own hills,
Where now his thoughts are flown ;
The Horseman turn’d his mailèd hand,
And spake in hollow tone :

XXI.

“ When the rushing tide of bayonets
Breaks crested up yon height,
And wide-mouth'd cannon thunder down
Their welcomes, left and right,

XXII.

“ I wait thee by the shallow ford,
When cheering on thy men ;
Flash all the waters round thine eyes,
Up to my saddle then !

XXIII.

“ And we will ride to a quiet place” . . .
“ Ah, cruel !” I burst forth,
“ That fallen Highlander will leave
Wide blank in the far North !

XXIV.

“Seest thou, in that peaceful home,
A fair and patient wife,
Teaching three children, at her knee,
To pray for ‘father’s life?’

XXV.

“Hast thou no pity?” . . . Tow’rds a tent
That stood apart he turn’d,
Where paced a sentry, and a lamp
Behind the canvass burn’d.

XXVI.

The Horseman gazed in silence ;
Then, with a heavy sigh,
“Old man,” he said, “the time is come
To lay thine armour by.

XXVII.

“Now forty years since first I stood
Over thee, on the plain,
When thou, in charging, wounded fell,
Upon the fields of Spain.

XXVIII.

“And since that time, thro’ years, till thou
A wider fame didst reach,—
Commanding where thy sword once led
Forlorn-hopes to the breach,

XXIX.

“My charger’s hoofs have often flasht
A stone’s throw from thy head;
And now, at last, thy day is come!”—
“Welcome to him!” I said.

XXX.

“ To such as he, O terrible
Dark Rider ! thro’ the world,
Thou com’st not ill, upon the wings
Of the rushing battle whirl’d.

XXXI.

“ In such as he, the flame that burn’d
Through long life to renown,
Is better blown out suddenly,
Than flickering slowly down

XXXII.

“ In a leaden socket, day by day ;
Fitter for all such ones,
Their veteran souls should march away,
To the music of the guns.

XXXIII.

“Tribute of reverential tears
Be paid them when they fall ;
But O ! from *these*, far spent upon
Life's journey, choose thou all

XXXIV.

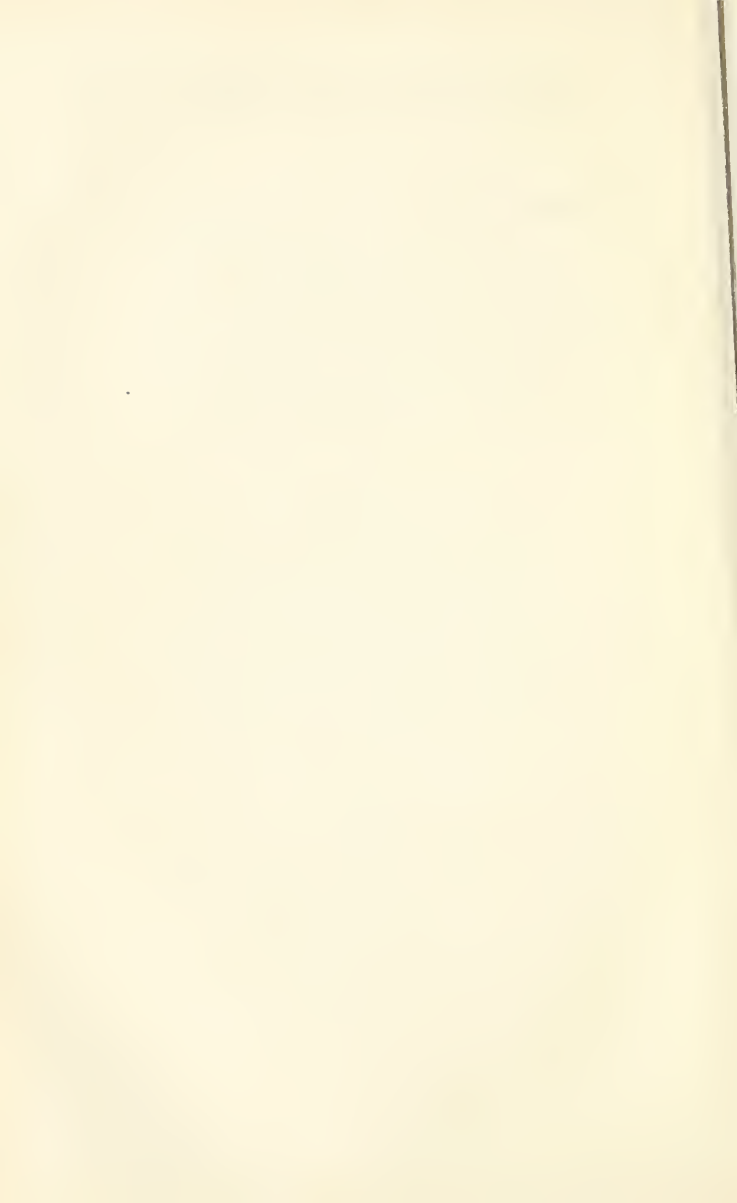
“Who ride to-morrow out of sight,
In mist—whate'er their worth—
Spare us the Flower of our Youth,
With such strong roots on earth !

XXXV.

“Spare us” . . . Then sudden rang a blast
The glimmering white tents through ;
And down them faded, as I gazed,
The Horseman from my view.

XXXVI.

I started—from a feverish sleep ;
The dawn was breaking grey ;
The shrill reveillé roused the camp
To life, once more, that day.



IN ITALY.



JOURNAL LEAVES.



NORBA AND NINFA.



ACROSS the ribs of brown and barren hills,
Jagg'd in the distance, where the snow hath set
Its stronghold in the fissures of high rocks,
With mule and mountaineer, we held our way :
The coast and sea, with Antium, on one side,
Circe's enchanted brow projecting far
Into the blue fields of the summer sky
Before us, and the Pontine Marsh below—
Its dreary flats and noxious-breathing pools,
Heavy and sad, as desolated life.

And for all habitation, lo ! high up,
Some crazy village, thrust upon the spears
Of a precipitate crag, o'ertops the plain ;
With fragments of a feudal tow'r to mark
Its ancient state. Thus, through the sharp
spring-day,

Between bare vine-sticks, and the yellow furze,
We journey'd on, until the Sun lay down,
At peace with all the world, upon the sea,
And from his pillow sliding, yet, 'twould seem,
Raised up his golden head for one last kiss.

* * * *

* * * *

With the blue wings of morning we uprose,
Traversed a tangled forest of low boughs,
Weaving its web for miles across the plain,

From which, emerging, we 'gan climb a height,
Girt with great fragments of a city-wall,
Whose builders, swept far down the gulf of time,
Are lost; their name, their speech—all, save
 these blocks,
Fronting the winds of heav'n, through ev'ry
 change
Of language, race, and dynasty, unmoved.
Awe-struck, we gaze. What were the implements—
What bars of unwrought iron—what giant hands
Wrench'd forth this granite from the mountain's
 womb,
And shaped and dovetail'd these polygonal blocks
Each into each—save those transversely laid
On upright stones, set wide for city gates?
 Primæval Architects, your walls have grown

Part of the grand old mountain once again ;
Crown'd with the asphodel's white waving plumes,
And rare brown orchids, sprouting 'twixt the
stones,
O'er which flash'd spears and targets in old time,
Rome sending forth its legions to besiege
The Volscian city. . . . Here's a postern left
Through which, perchance, the Volscian maidens
pass'd
Of summer nights, in peace-time, to draw wells
Without the city, and to lend an ear
To vows, the same men swear 'neath harvest-
moons,
In ev'ry age and clime. The passage now
Of that low door dun-colour'd oxen guard,
Staring upon us, like the Gods in stone,

Wide-eyed, immoveable, its sentinels,
As are the goats that pasture in the Arx,
The city's bearded senators, white robed.

Close in the umbrage of the wall we sat,
And argued all the city's points, and brought
Our scant Etruscan learning to the field
Over a wheaten cake and flask of milk.
Then, rising in the noon-heat, we began
Down the steep mountains' crumbling face of slags
Leaping and slipping, grasping, where we could,
Meshes of wither'd roots, to strike a path
Each for himself: so down into the plain,
Where the deserted Ninfa sits among
The river's rushes, just as she was left
Three hundred years ago,—her saints in blue
And red upon the walls,—a sculptured rose,

Yet skeleton'd, hath dropt its purple leaves
From the east window; and the quaint gargoyle
Stands open-mouth'd to belch the water forth,
Its pipe alone being burst: but all o'ergrown
With a fantastic luxury of leaves,
The walls and roofs; for here a trail of vine,
There the wild fig, and, all about, tall weeds
Swinging their fragrant censers in the wind,
Up the long-silent monastery aisles.—
From classic, thus, to mediæval time
Is but a step; so to this present day
Of common-place—(the Diligence was stopp'd
Last week by thieves, they tell, upon this road)—
As mounting on our mules, we turn their heads
Towards Velletri, 'cross the Pontine Marsh.

April 26th.

RAVENNA.



NOT of the master-mind, whose deathless fame
Rings thy just pride into the Future's ear,
For that you held him dead, and raised him
here

The stone, Ravenna, sculptur'd with his name.*

Not his the memory to me most dear,
Dreaming the past, in thy deserted streets ;
Less, the imperial pomp, the Roman fleets,
Flushing thy ports with purple sails each year.

* Dante.

My thoughts are with the men, who dared to
rear
A Christian Temple* 'mong the heathen race,
And bid, on pagan shafts, the dome appear,
Arch'd, like God's palm of blessing o'er the place—
Walls, where Giotto's pencil yet sings clear,
Triumphant hymns of majesty and grace.

Nov. 4th.

* The church of S. Vitale, at Ravenna, was the first in Italy that had a dome : built after Saint Sophia's at Constantinople.

CASTEL FUSANO.



THROUGH the old Fusano forest, sloping downwards to the shore,

By an ancient Roman pavement, worn by chariot-wheels of yore,

We descend; wall'd in by thickets, where the rosemaries intertwine

With the daphne, and the arras hangings of the gold broom shine.

Higher up, straight stately pine-trees spread their
fingers dark and green,
Keeping out the sun, and making bluer yet the
sky between.

And the twisted arms of olive with the darker
ilex grow,
And the silver thistle, star-like, brightens all the
gloom below.

Nothing in the lazy noon-tide stirring, save that,
as we pass,
From our feet a lizard darting, bristles sharply
through the grass;

Carpeted with purple buds, and widening ever
and anon,
To a glade with pools of water, flasht with broken
gleams of sun.

Down unto the yellow sea-beach, lipp'd by waves
so blue and calm,
With a line of level sand-banks, stretching out-
wards like an arm.

Here and there a blacken'd pine-root, washt with
weeds, and nothing more ;
Save a group of coral fishers, scarlet-capp'd upon
the shore,*

* From the bay of Naples : they often land on this coast.

With their boat moor'd near them, into which
were led our willing feet ;

Tawny limbs plunged after, thrusting out into the
sea. . . How sweet

To feel the tremble of the waters, 'neath our
shallop as it floats ! . . .

. . . To lie and watch the lengthen'd ripple in
the shadow of the boats :

Fresh sea-breath upon our faces, scarcely filling
the latine ;

Ischian love-songs from the helmsman, praying
“ she be quickly seen

At her window"; and the diving down for sea-
shells, o'er the side,
Trailing, too, our heated fingers in the blue
delicious tide.

Perfect peace above, below us; till the sun's red
arrows reach
The horizon; then we bid them run the boat's
head on the beach.

Leaping to the shore, we wander back another
way, through trees,
Where the tangled vine-locks hanging wave, like
Absalom's, in the breeze.

And upon the pathway overgrown, and flusht with
sunset dyes,

In a net-work of blue shadows, white goats eye
us with surprise ;

As, through all the budded brambles, where they
feed, we force our way

To the hunting-lodge, whose house-top, guard the
sentinels in grey.

Home, across the salt-pool'd marshes ; round us
flights of wild birds wait ;

And the moon rides on the Tiber, when we reach
the city gate.

May 10th.

A PLEASANT walk ; here, as we wander on,
Up from the mosses and the tangled ferns,
Wells a young stream, forth-gushing from the
mouth

Of the rich ruddy earth, like hidden thoughts
That burst in music from a poet's lips.

Through the brown mould the crocus thrusts its
shield

Of tender green ; anon, its golden spears.
Anemones flush the pale fields : the year
Already with green fingers counts its age,
And the air palpitates with breathings warm ;

Sighs the Spring heaves, on wakening from her
sleep.

O, for this land ! when shall *she* waken up ?

Is there no spring—no putting on of leaves

For her ? . . . Shall strength be never more
infused

Through all the channels of her stagnant life ?

The seasons have no healthy influence

Throughout her moral year. The sun but draws

A sweet decaying odour from the earth.

ROME, *March 5th.*

AN EVENING'S WALK, ALBANO.



Down o'er the sunset-ledge, one lonely bird
Dips in the great blue lake,
Fluffing along the surface, where the spears
Of flags and rushes shake.

In Palazzola's monastery-garden
Three Franciscans sit,
Round the boles of their enormous laurels,
Watching the shadows flit.

The heats and little winds have died away,
 In silence calm and deep,
Like the hot mid-day passions of man's life,
 Hushing to gradual sleep.

We wander round the shore, until we catch
 The silver of the seas,
And the sharp outline of Soracte shows.
 'Neath broad-arm'd chesnut-trees.

In gold-green shadow lies the lake, below
 The height whereon we stand ;
Old Rome's Campagna on the other side,
 Stretching out wild and grand.

St. Peter's dome a-level with the sun,
Far as may reach the eye,
Hangs, like a burnisht drop, upon the skirts
Of the clear opal sky.

Then from Gandolfo's Castle of the Popes
We turn our steps, adown
Through Barberini's terraces and pines,
Back to Albano's town.

March 28th.

As one who, walking on a summer's day

'Neath branching trees, afar from the noon
glare,

Sees not the sun, but feeleth, here and there,
A beam among the flickering foliage play,

So I, from thy sweet presence past away,

Down thickset paths, where the sun-sparkling
air,

That lent such colour to life's common grey,

Is overshadow'd,—sudden am aware

Of a gleam, lightening all my forward way ;

When through the lapse of distance falls a word

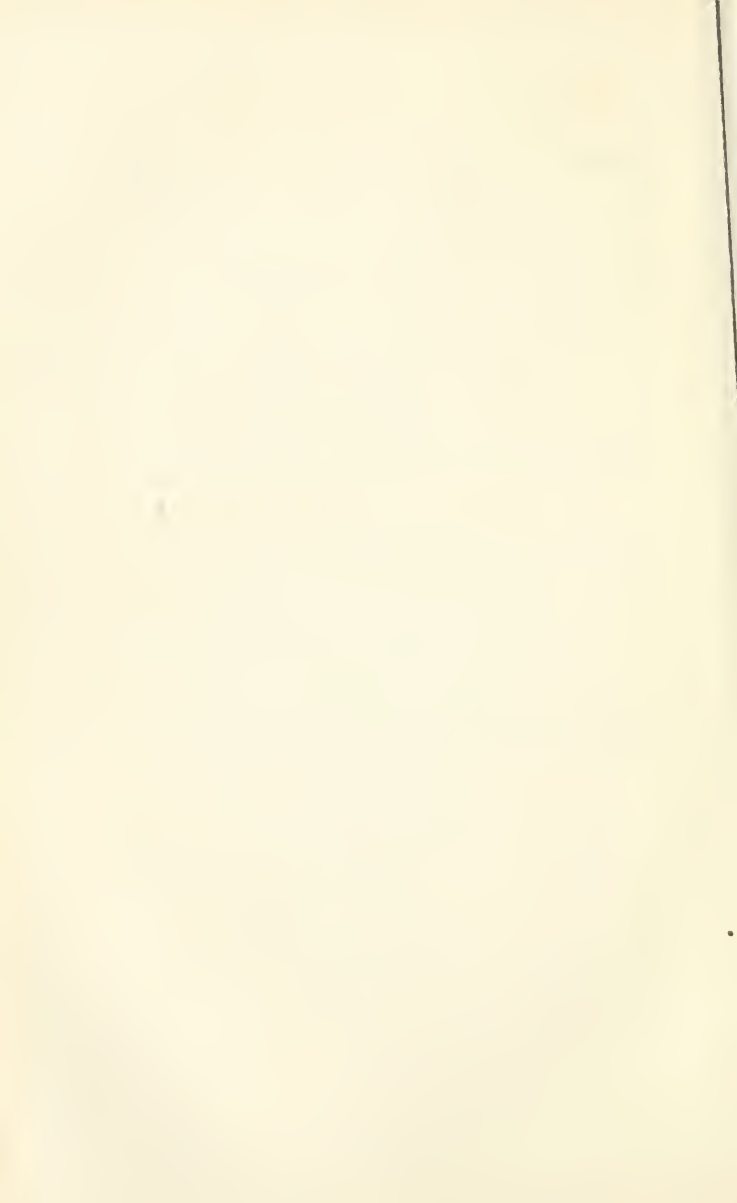
Radiant and cheering, and my heart is stir'd

By the quick influence of that warm ray.

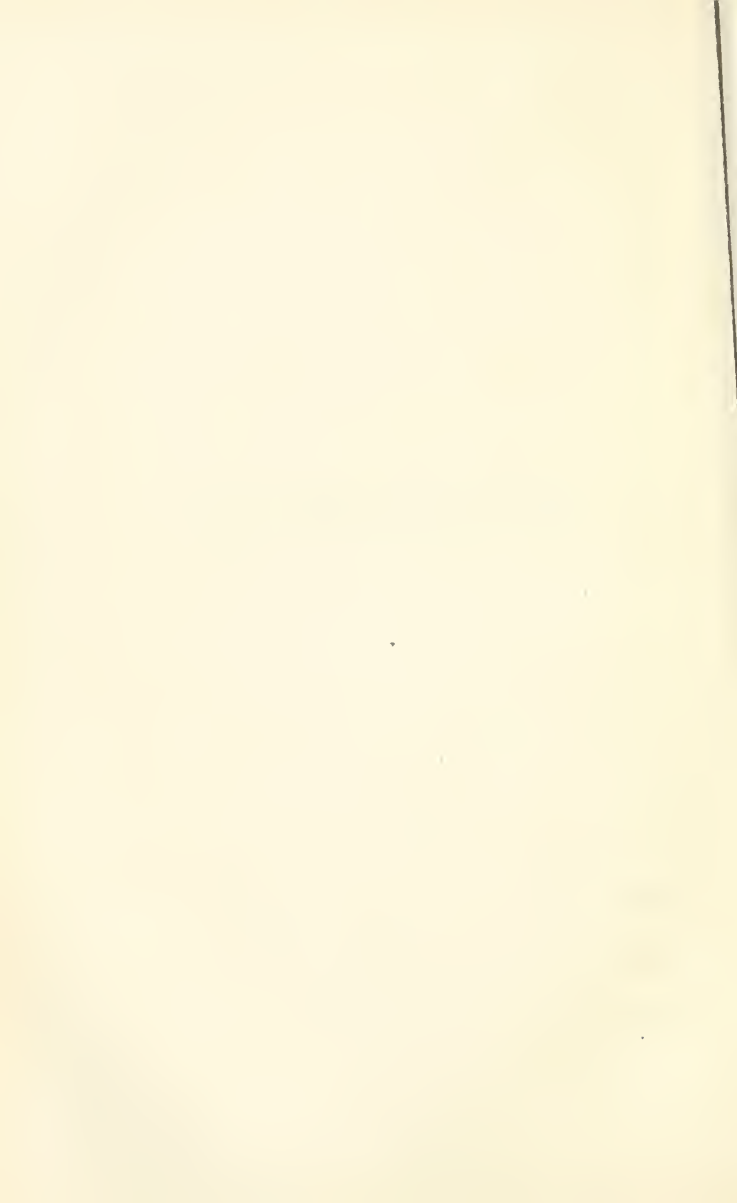
Let it shine often ; since, like cagèd bird,

My heart sings only, when those sunbeams
play.

August 1st.



MISCELLANEOUS POEMS.



TO ALICE * * * *



Now sixteen years since I—a sunny boy,
Who saw the world through two bright happy
eyes—
Stood by the altar, when thy marriage vows
Were read, and the responses from beneath
The argent-lace and orange-flowers rose,
Like the sweet breath of southern nights in June.
I look'd upon thy face,—how fair it was !
It shone with eager hopes and happy tears ;
And I, who drew my knowledge from the mouth

Of fairy-tales, thought this the rounded close
Of a life's story, when thou took'st the ring . . .
Could I, in truth, have traversed that dim gulf,
Where the dark shades of our tomorrows lie,
How the gold dream had faded ! seeing thee
So flatter'd then, and so forsaken now ;
Dying a daily death, whose spirit stood
Cloudless and heaven-colour'd as the sea.

O Purity of Soul ! whose virgin-robe
Clothed us, as little children, when we lay
Upon our mothers' breasts, too few, alas !
Cling to thee fast. . . . The heavy-scented winds
Of this fair earth blow all so sunny-warm,
In the spring-burst of life, that ere we wist,
Little by little, fold from snowy fold

It falls and falls—and lo! we stand, unrobed,
Cheek burning, and abasht, as they who walk'd
Under the garden-trees in Paradise.

Oh, a *first* crime—how heavily it rolls
Upon the sepulchre of a sinful heart!
All the hot agony of midnight tears
Washes it not away. The stars will shine
As they were shining one short hour ago.
No sound,—the winds are sleeping 'mong the
 hills,
And the deep peace of night remains unchanged.
Only for *him*, no peace! for he hath heard
The wings of the recording angel, as he swept
Over his sinful head! * *

* * * * Say, had'st thou not

Most that this world can give?—Not *thine* the
plea

That drives poor houseless women into shame.

Pity for them, O unforgiving world ;

But what for thee ? with children, station, wealth,

All a life's blessings compass'd,—saving one.

Though false the vows that rose with thine to God,

Though asking for a heart thou found'st a stone,

Was this enough to fling the house-gods low ?

And leave to hirelings all thy cradle-cares ?

Did not thy dead babes, watching from the sky,

Cry shame on thee ? — the grey head from its

tomb,—

Smote not his blessing at thy conscience' door ?

Wit, beauty, and the grace that, Midas-like,

Turns all to gold it touches, these were thine.

Rare gifts, like glory, circling thy young head,
Misused, and tarnisht to a tinsel crown.

We do not judge thee. God alone can count
The secret beatings of our sinful hearts.

He strikes the balance. Let us wait and pray!

.

A FRAGMENT.



* * * *

O LOVE immortal! how is it thy birth
Keeps its close secret from all schools on earth?
Good men have lack'd thee—earnest men and
strong—

In the Lord's vineyard laboring all day long.
And yet the heav'n we dream of would be dark
Without our human love,—that only spark
Of this bright planet we may bear away,
To grow more glorious in the Realms of Day!

* * * *

Oh! when we think how very brief a span
We hold within the memory of Man,—
How a few days, or months, will fade our name
Back to the white oblivion whence it came,—
If we should trace no line in red or gold
Upon our lives, as on the tombs of old,
The thought comes up, “What can I do to make
My life a landmark for the Future’s sake?”
Not in loud deeds, or monuments, or books,
Blazed out upon the world; but in the nooks
Of a home-circle, where some two or three
Are climbing up, as I go down the tree,—
Those few with whom my soul is outward-bound
On that deep sea of Love, Death cannot sound:
To whom my life, with its experience large,
Should be a river’s map, whereof the marge

Is clearly traced, with all its rocky strands,
And shoals, and currents strong, and shifting
 sands,
And beacons, standing up, like warning hands!

SONG.



I.

I SAT with my Egyptian maid
Down by the river silently.
The red moon, with her half-shut eye,
Upon the glassy stream hard by,
Among the lotos-flowers played
Sleepily!

II.

I spake no word, but wound the flow'r
Through her dark tresses dreamily.

Her ear-rings tinkled on my breast,
The rich deep silence spake the rest—
Our lives were wrapt in that one hour
Peacefully!

A WALK AND A WORD.



Do you recall our woodland walk

After the recent showers of rain?

The soft sand underneath our tread,

The wind that shook the boughs o'erhead,

And brought a moment's shower again?

The whisper'd secrets of the leaves—

The silent listening air below—

The cheerful voice of some far bird,

High up among the branches heard—

The little stream's untiring flow? . . .

Do you recall some transient words

That sank down in my heart that day ?

We count the past with words like these,

As circles mark the growth of trees,

And never can be washed away !

HIDDEN THOUGHTS.



O THE thoughts that rise unbidden
In the secret heart of Man ;
Thoughts no dearest eye may scan,
False and true together hidden,
In this heart of Man !

Far, far down by night they glitter,
In his heart's remotest cave
Buried, where the rippling wave
Cannot reach them : sad and bitter
Thoughts within their grave.

Thoughts of the past, that, in derision,
Rise to haunt him ; till he beat
Down, and trample under feet,
As the phantoms of a vision,
Each remembrance sweet :

Each wild wish, each fierce emotion,
Utter'd not, and all unguessed
In that tender woman's breast,
Heaving as a summer ocean,
Where his head is prest.

Or be it some guilty section
Of his past, that, like a knife,
Seems to part him from that wife ;
(Though 'twere claspt from all detection
Till the close of life.)

Oh! the day when death shall sever
That fond heart from human things,
Soaring on her spirit-wings,
Sudden she shall see, for ever,
All the hidden springs,

All the thoughts that did enfold them,
Far away from human view,
In the heart she thought she knew,
Her pure eyes shall then behold them,
Knowing false from true.

And the false she'll pity rather,
For the true which she perceives ;
While on earth the tares she leaves,
All the love and worth will gather
Into heavenly sheaves.

Men judge not with Christian meekness,
 Seeing, in this twilight, more
 Than the Angels, who deplore
All the sum of human weakness,
 Tried and tempted sore.

Let the thought remain before him,
 Who—through every passionate shoal,—
 Would a storm-driv'n heart controul,
That some Saint is standing o'er him,
 Reading all his soul.

THE fount is dry, my friend, since last we met ;
You say you find me cold, but you forget
There falls no shadow when the sun is set—
All one grey level gloom—such life is mine.

No shock of fate hath power to move me more,
Its best for him, its worst for me was o'er,
When that dear heart was wafted from the shore,
Out of our sight :—yet do I not repine.

Over the bosom of the hungry sea
Broke ne'er a cry : full peacefully sank he ;
In clear-cold morning on the shore stood we,
Waiting for sun that never more should shine.

KING CHILDERIC IN THE CLOISTER.

A.D. 750.



God give me patience, miserable King
That am, beneath the cowl ! on whom the sun
Shines but one hour a day, when slanting through
These cloister-arches : where my sandall'd feet
Break the grey moss-grown silence of the flags—
I, that was wont to meet the sun at morn,
And take my pleasure, as became a king,
In sports, all day, across the plain. Woe's me !
How changed am I !—seems all, that yet's
unchanged !

The same wind that, through purple curtains,
 scarce

Lifted the rushes from my palace floor,
 In the old time, around a bare damp cell
 Now freezes all my bones. Ah, hunger, thirst,
 Vigil and painful penance, come to none
 Of these poor monks so hardly as to me.
 For one hath left his vineyard by the Rhine,
 To whom, as he was delving on a day,
 The blessèd Mary show'd herself: and one,
 A poor aureficer in Aix, whose home
 The plague left desolate. From mountain hut,
 Or camp, or city, come they hither; led
 By that strong inward voice, men christen'd
 'Faith,'
 But like me, none. . . Well, well, and so, because

I shun their simple talk of beeves and goats,
 They whisper, that by reason of some crime
 Hanging like mill-stone round me, am I come,
 To expiate the past. And here, in truth,
 I pace the flags each day ; and muse, as oft
 I watch the spiders weave athwart the wall
 Thin silken death-nets for the foolish flies,
 ‘So weaved his webs around my helpless youth,
 Th’ unloyal crafty head, where sits my crown :
 Founder, methinks, of a long line of kings.’
 For so I dream’d last night it is decreed,
 The Merovingian race should pass away
 For ever,—*Sicut herba transeat*—
 Then these in turn, gave place, their work being
 done.

The builder setteth up, and pulleth down,

Building his tow'r. We are but stocks and
stones,

Shaped to his mighty purpose.

Hark! the bell

Rings in to vespers; and the brothers pass

Down the side-cloister, eyeing me askance.

Sweet sunshine—bird, upon the cloister-roof,

Farewell until tomorrow. Now they sing,

'Ecce quàm bonum habitare est

Fratres in unum.' . . . What a mock'ry 'tis!

LEGEND

OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE CONVENT OF
NOTRE-DAME-DE-LA-BICHE, A.D. 1200.



I.

WITHIN a castle-garden, all battlemented round,
Where marjoram, and rosemary, and wallflow'r
did abound,

A lady leant, at day's decline, toward the darken-
ing sky ;

And on the wall, her silver shears and tapestrie
laid by.

The silk was interwoven all with threads of
golden hair—

The which her dainty fingers wrought, in rich
devices there.

Love-knot, and motto; with the badge of her
liege-lord and knight,

For all true men to rally round, when seen in
hottest fight.

For he has cross'd the dangerous seas to fight in
distant lands,

And she will sit for many a month, with beads
between her hands,

Now that her task is finish'd, and tomorrow's sun
must shine

Upon the page, who bears this gage to her Lord
in Palestine.

She leant her head upon her hand—her thoughts
were far away ;

When up there sprang a little wind, born with
the death of day.

Swiftly and suddenly it came, and with a whist-
ling call,

It seized the banner in its arms, and swept it
from the wall !

She, leaping up, with arms dis-spread, thrice
vainly clutch'd the air.

And from her wimple, down there fell her wild
affrayèd hair ;

And right along the battlements she ran, with
piercing cry,

As the silk banner floated up, against the golden
sky.

The varlets in the courtyard heard the scream,
and started up

There was mounting in the stirrup,—and no time
for stirrup-cup!

A riding forth of horsemen—a scouring of the
plain—

And then,—an empty-handed return at dark
again!

And all that night, and all next day—within the
chapel dim,

She pray'd to ev'ry saint in the calendar for
him—

—Her own true Lord—because of this ill omen,
that God's breath

Had blown away that banner—Love's talisman
from death!

All—all in vain—they scour'd the plain—they
plunged through pools and reeds ;

Troubling the wild-birds, for their nests among
the marish weeds :

But when, in expectation sore, at the third set
of sun,

She saw them, with their loosen'd reins, returning
one by one ;

The lady knelt, in sight of all, and vow'd a
solemn vow :

“ O Blessed Mother Mary! give hearing to me
now !

Restore this thing,—and on the spot—I swear—
where'er it be—

A Convent, Blessed Mary, will I build in praise
of Thee !”

Next morning rode a hunter, with the bugle at
his lips,

Through the thicket in the hollow, when, sudden
show'd the tips

Of a white doe's startled ears among the ferns—
and there—behold!

Her two-days' fawn lay nestled in the banner's
broider'd fold.

Unheeding of the doe, I wist, with 'mazed and
thankful eyes,

(As who should cast a net for sprats, and haul
some great sea-prize),

The hunter seized his treasure, and blew so loud
a blast,

Across the moat, its glad sound smote, "The lost
is found at last!"

In the hall was great rejoicing: the men drank
deep that night—

The maids and pages jested; the lady's heart
beat light:

And twenty gallant men rode forth to Palestine
next morn,

And in the wood the builders stood, and fell'd
down birch and thorn.

PART II.

HER heart was two years heavier, when, from her
tow'r one day,

She spied a gallant company come pricking up
this way :

Their spear-points take the morning-sun, and
gleam like meteor-fires ;

Foremost there rides a red-cross knight, behind
him ride his squires.

They wind up to the castle-gate—she sees the
drawbridge fall :—

Her cheek is waxen whiter 'gainst the loop-hole
in the wall,—

She hears the hoofs ring round the court, the
lusty bowmen swear,
A clang of spur and mailed heel comes slowly
up the stair.

She reels a pace toward the door—lo! there
before her stands
The trusty Page, sir-knighted for his deeds in
Paynim lands;
With brow of gloom, beneath his plume, he
kneels, while murmurs she;
“Now Christ belie your woful looks, what tidings
bear you me?”

“What tidings of my Lord, Sir Page?” then he
in accents low,
“Dear Lady, brace your heart for I would pluck
my tongue forth now,

Sooner than tell the sorest news that ever met
your ear . . .

The Saints have charge of him—He died, as a
knight should, never fear !

“ He fell upon the Syrian plain : or ever I could
reach

The banner to his loving head, on Ascalon’s red
beach,

A shaft had pierced the greaves—I bent me o’er
his dying head,

And caught between the gasps of breath, the last
words that he said.

“ Bear home love’s message, for Christ’s sake, to
my dear wife, and say

God’s will is done : it had not gone so hard with
me this day,

If my own lady's banner had waved o'er me, like
a shield ;

But first,—my page, I charge thee, win thy spurs
upon the field.' ”

The lady left the castle-wall ; pass'd through the
castle-gate ;

To the white Convent in the wood, she rode in
all her state.

There, with her wealth of castle-lands, the sister-
hood endow'd ;

Nor ever doff'd their black hood, but when she
donn'd her shroud.

* * * * *

* * * * *

Up in the Convent-chapel, some centuries after,
 hung
Shreds of a dust-encumber'd banner, where the
 cobwebs swung,
And nuns show'd their first Abbess here in
 marble, sleeping grand,
A couchant stag beneath her feet, and banner in
 her hand.

Still ribald varlets sing the tale, with many quips
 and jeers,
To travellers through the valley, as the Convent-
 spire appears ;
And tell, by what a cunning trick, ' Our Lady of
 the Doe,'
Got this fine Convent built for her, some hundred
 years ago.

SONG.



My love's worth all the world to me ;
Her walk, to others' dance, seems light.
When she comes by, the sun rides high,
And when she's past, 'tis night !

Her gentle voice that bids ' good-day '
The music is, my soul loves best ;
Her deep-set eyes, her low replies,
The dreams that haunt my rest.

Her presence like fresh morning showers,
 Maketh more green earth's greenest place ;
If she but stoop, sweet buds that droop,
 Look up into her face.

That May-day face—where nothing lives
 That is not bright, for long together ;
Emotions pass her brow across,
 Like clouds in golden weather.

Life's passing shades have scarcely chill'd
 The gladness of her spirit's light—
O, when she's by, the sun seems high,
 And when she's past, 'tis night !

“SHE SAT BESIDE THE MOUNTAIN
SPRINGS.”

I.

SHE sat beside the mountain springs,
Her feet were on the water's brink,
And oft she wept when she beheld
The birds that lighted there to drink ;
She wept : but as they spread their wings,
Her sweet voice followed in the sky—
“He will return—I know him well ;
He would not leave me here to die.”

II.

And there she sat, as months roll'd on,
Unmindful of the changing year ;
She heeded not the snow and rain,
All seasons were the same to her.

She look'd upon the frozen stream,
She listen'd to the night-bird's cry :
“ He will return—I know him well ;
He would not leave me here to die.”

III.

He came not ! all in vain she watch'd,
And dress'd the gold drips of her hair ;
Red berries for a bridal crown,
She places every morning there.
At ev'ry shadow on the grass
She starts, and murmurs with a sigh,
“ He will return—I know him well ;
He would not leave me here to die.”

A FRAGMENT.



THERE is a music runs throughout the stars,—
A constant harmony, sublime and low,
That soothes my spirit. Such a night as this,
The grand old German, rising from his books,
Open'd his lattice, and let in a flood
Of heav'nly melody. All thoughts that live,
However shaped, through time, are rain'd from
Heaven.

POPPIES.



“ On one side is a field of drooping oats,
Through which the poppies show their scarlet coats,
So pert and useless, that they call to mind
The scarlet coats that pester human kind.”

KEATS.

NOTHING is useless. Do not scorn

These poppies of the field :

Who thinks a space will not despise

Their blushful cheeks and downcast eyes,

Rememb'ring all they yield.

The life-blood of the golden land,

They greet the passer-by :

Flushing, with ev'ry wind that's born,

The heaving bosom of the corn,

Under the summer sky.

Ah, fitting is it ye should grow

Beside the "staff of life,"—

The one our strength from day to day,

The other a pow'r to smoothe away

All human care and strife !

When on some fever'd bed, perchance,

The corn will not avail,

Nor wine, nor any potions deep,

To call one little hour of sleep

Over the eyelids pale ;

'Tis then those "useless scarlet coats"

(Like some of human kind)

Prove their strong hearts can soothe distress,

For all they wear a gaudy dress,

That flutters in the wind.

Their sun-dried leaves have not in vain

Outlived the harvest-day,

If life has gain'd one hour of peace—

If troubles for a moment cease—

Under the Poppy's sway.

DANCE ON, MAIDEN.*

DANCE on, Maiden, up on the hill,
Fresh as at day-break, unwearying still ;
Dimpling the grass with thy dainty feet,
Like the wings of a bird o'er the waters fleet.
What a spirit there is in those proud young arms
Tossing the hair back that shadows thy charms !
—The only shadow across thy brow.
O would I could dance as light-hearted as thou !

* Set to music by Jacques Blumenthal.

Dance on, Maiden, for who can say
Thou shalt dance again, as thou dost to-day?
Thy cithern may break, or thy heart may discover
A tune it loves better—the voice of a lover!
But now thou knows't nothing of passion or
 sorrow,
Thy heart's in thy feet—will it be so to-morrow?
Then dance while it beats to that light measure
 now.
O would I could dance as light-hearted as thou!

A HEALTH.



HOLD me content, when wine goes round,
To pledge thee, as the unseen guest,
Whose face against my shoulder prest,
Its shadow in the bowl is found.

For me—in those reflected eyes,
Gather, at times, such tender tears—
I read such watchful hopes and fears,—
—At times, such sorrowful surprise,

When falling from the crystal height

Where thou didst set me, that my cheek

Flushes as though I heard thee speak,

Through all the riot of the night.

Absent! ah, never; till for me

Love's light in those clear eyes burn dim;

A health when bubbles bead the brim,

My ever-present dear, to thee!

TWO MISTRESSES.



SHE wore a yellow gown, with filagrees ;

I watch'd her swarthy cheek, that sudden
flush'd,

And sudden, ghastly deaden'd, with the thrust
His rapier-wit sent through her, to the lees

Of her heart's blood. He strokes his beard, and
twirls

His pourpoint's tassel, as he turns to speak
To a ripe beauty, with a Rubens-cheek,
And large white bosom, overlaid with pearls,

Seated beside him on the flow'ry green,
Who whispers in his ear some amorous staves,
And through gold rivers of whose hair he laves
His fingers, laughing at the other's spleen.

* * * * *
* * * * *

In the first grey of dawn, a figure stands,
And draws aside the damask of the bed . . .
Then to the fountain with a stealthy tread—
The fishes sicken'd where she wash'd her hands.

I HOLD it rarer than all mental gifts,

To find that breadth of outline in the soul,
The just articulation of each part,

The true completion of the rounded whole.

That fine consistent oneness, that alike

In sounds and forms we prize—so rarely seen,
Where nothing jars, or makes a dissonance

In the heart's music of a life's routine.

Believe me, rare this soul-completeness is ;

We mostly have two separate selves, and each
Stares at his neighbour, as unknowing how

He stands a guest within the other's reach.

The veil-rent corners of a great man's heart,

After his death evince this, when we read
Of its wild riot. Thus, in darkest lives,

Will shine one glorious solitary deed.

The same soul-picture, seen from different sides,

Wears different aspect. To the partial friend
Hood-winkt, and to sharp critic-spectacles,

Two distinct shadows doth one image send.

“WHEN WE ARE PARTED,” &c.*



I.

WHEN we are parted, let me lie

In some far corner of thy heart,

Silent, and from the world apart,

Like a forgotten melody.

Forgotten of the world beside,

Cherisht by one, and one alone,

For some loved memory of its own ;

So let me in thy heart abide

When we are parted !

* Set to music by Jacques Blumenthal.

II.

When we are parted, keep for me

The sacred stillness of the night,—

That hour, sweet love, is mine by right ;

Let others claim thy day of thee !

The cold world sleeping at our feet,

My spirit shall discourse with thine.

When stars upon thy pillow shine,

At thy heart's door I stand and beat,

Though we are parted !

THE MOUSQUETAIRE'S MESSENGER.



GALLOP, gallop, my little steed,

Gallop across the plain ;

Bear my message at topmost speed,

And bring one to me again.

Snort and neigh her casement round,

Paw the frosty garden-ground ;

Wake her, though her sleep be sound.



“ O come with me, love, through the world,

Leaning on my circled arm ;

No breath shall stir thy ringlet curl'd,

'Gainst my cheek, secure from harm !

“To-night I mount the palace guard ;

But beneath to-morrow's moon,

By the postern in the yard,

One shall whistle a low tune.

“Lightly down the darken'd stair,

Up into my stirrup light,

With thy guardsman's arm around thee,

We will gallop through the night,

Across the meadow, down the lane,

Swift our moonlit ride shall be.” . . .

Gallop, gallop, across the plain,

And back, my steed, to me.

Underneath thy saddle bow,

Trustingly, I now bestow

True love-words. . . . My faithful, go !

BIRD, on the eaves of my belovèd's dwelling,
Sing out what I would breathe into her ear,
May the full love within my bosom swelling,
Through thee find utt'rance musical and clear.

Swifter than thine, my spirit's wing will take me,
And where thou can'st not go, through crystal
pane ;

But Love's interpreter to her I make thee,
On window-sill, outpouring thy rich strain.

Tell her my heart beats with tumultuous passion,

For the soft haven of its long unrest :

In spring, from our dead past, new hopes we

fashion,

As thou, from mosses of thy last year's nest.

And though again, through wintry seasons parted,

Still in her faith as in a mantle furl'd,

Bid her be steadfast and courageous-hearted,

Nor bow before the keen breath of the world.

Sing, bird, from up the house-top to the cellar,

Through all the rooms, thy passionate love-

songs sing ;

But when thou fliest hence, in autumn, tell her,

Love, once enthron'd there, never can take wing.

SLEEP.



IN the still time of sleep,
I dream of thee ;
Like stars, so far but bright,
Thine eyes smile through the night
Down upon me.

The voices of my sleep
Outsing all birds ;
Breathing continuous streams
Of music in my dreams,
Thy parting words !

Then entereth in that world

Nor grief nor ill :

I hold thee to my heart ;

Thou can'st not then depart,

But liest still.

From the deep peace of sleep,

At morn I rise,

For thee to toil and fight,

Then sheathe the sword at night,

And close my eyes.

DESOLATION.



WINTRY day, cold and grey,
As my heart in this chill place ;
Will no wind, blithe and kind,
Waft a smile into thy face ?

Drops of rain, like dull pain,
Throb upon the heavy air,
Growing thick, beating quick,
With the pulse of a despair.

All about,—within, without,

Creeps the blank and cheerless grey :

O for one, like the sun,

Who should drive these clouds away !

A FRIEND'S SORROW.



Bow down thine ear, O Lord, and hear the cry
Of thy sad servant. She he loved is dead ;
Pass'd from the clasp of loving arms, and fled
From human pain to realms beyond the sky.
Thou, Lord, who in thy mercy did'st not spare
Thy Son for us, pity this human love,
So true, so passionate ; and teach him to bear
The sacrifice Thou call'st for from above.
All men love not so, and to few the cup

Has the full bitterness it has for him.
Compass'd with love, yet all the way seems dim.
Her light removed a little higher up.
Teach him, in that soul purified, to see
A lamp, O Lord, that burns henceforth for thee.

Never again, perhaps—though life may yield
 Its conquer'd struggles, and its hard-earn'd
 fame,
 With some calm friendships in congenial field—
 Never shall strong affections grow the same.

All fountain-heads of love seem dry, they think :
 And, with a thirsty longing, they are fain
 To reach up to the purple skies, and drink
 Back some of their lost happiness again.

O, fling out garlands in your morning-suns,
 On ev'ry stream of strong and faithful love ;
 Though brackish of the earth through which it
 runs,
 'Twill deepen, and reflect the sky above.

NEW YEAR'S DAY, 1855.

BRIDE, with thy trustful eyes full on the future,

And thy smile of pure delight ;

Mother, whose babe was laid safe in thy bosom

By the angels, yesternight ;

Sister, at home in the firelight spinning ;

Sailor-brother, at sea far away ;

To all, and to each, at this year's beginning,

Many happy returns of the day !

And ye who are keeping the New-Year together,
 With one empty chair between,
Awaiting and dreading the news of to-morrow,
 As ye pledge the dear unseen ;
And ye, who on battle-field see New-Year's
 morning,
 With thoughts of your homes far away,
We will drink, gallant hearts, to your homeward
 returning,
And a happier return of this day !

THE END.

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